

Ronald Rompkey. *Terre-Neuve Anthologie des voyageurs français 1814-1914.*

Scott Jamieson

Volume 20, Number 2, Fall 2005

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/nflds20_2rv05

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

0823-1737 (print)

1715-1430 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Jamieson, S. (2005). Review of [Ronald Rompkey. *Terre-Neuve Anthologie des voyageurs français 1814-1914.*]. *Newfoundland Studies*, 20(2), 321–323.

Elisabeth Greenleaf's Introduction describes the ethnic and historical mix of music that she found — English, Irish, American, Canadian, French songs and ballads from the seventeenth century down to contemporary compositions. She gives many anecdotes about her collecting experiences and tells where her singers got *their* songs. She describes the traditional performance style of old-timers, the unchanging volume and deadpan delivery coupled with elaborately ornamented turns, slurs, grace notes, quavers and syncopations; and how, in the middle of the last line, they stop singing and speak the end of the line, indicating “the conclusion of the song” and the “descent to earth from the heights of Parnassus” (xxxviii). Throughout, she beautifully and sympathetically evokes the appeal of the demanding lives she glimpsed in her several visits to this northern world.

Many a sailor lad, rebelling against ship's discipline, has preferred the bleak and forbidding coast of Newfoundland to further hell afloat. Many an Irish family has chosen the emigrants' trail in order to escape famine or political trouble in Ireland, or in hope of owning their own homestead in Newfoundland, where land is still free to any one who will fence and clear it.... Passing one day in a motor boat a little sea islet, a gray rock set like a gem in brilliant greens against the cold lead-colored ocean, we waved to some ragged children and a thin solitary figure of a woman. “There you are seeing the real Newfoundland,” remarked Dr. Parsons. Not in St. John's, not in the cosmopolitan lumber towns, but on a lonely rock where firewood and even drinking water present serious problems, can we sense their passion for independence, which seasons their monotonous food and wraps their bodies against the chill air. (xxvi)

It is a gift to have this book reissued in such a clear and readable format.

Ruth Perry
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Ronald Rompkey. *Terre-Neuve Anthologie des voyageurs français 1814-1914*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004, ISBN 2-86847-966-9

WELL-KNOWN BIOGRAPHER and editor Ronald Rompkey has produced a rich anthology of writings in French that is particularly welcome after a year of celebrations marking 500 years of French presence in Newfoundland — a year that has likely whet more than one appetite for this part of the province's history. The collection brings to light over 40 excerpts, up to several pages long, from texts about Newfoundland and its inhabitants written over the course of an important period in history — the final hundred years of the French Shore fishery. Few of the texts have been reprinted (and even fewer translated) since their original publication in France and virtually all have lain forgotten. Rompkey's intention — to provide high school and university students, along with the general public, with an idea of how New-

foundland was perceived by French visitors as it underwent the transformation from a colony to a country — is admirable, though likely to prove challenging for those whose French is not up to scratch. The selections were made according to two criteria: how they depict Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders and their way of life, and how they show Newfoundland as a country with its own political institutions.

A discussion of even a small sample would require more space than I have here. Instead, I hope that the following fairly complete list of (my own freely translated) titles of the selections will illustrate the astounding diversity and depth of material the book contains. A Hike from Croque Harbour to Hare Bay (1817), Botany in Bay St. George (1819), Population Increase on the West Coast (1821), Some Local Remedies (1822), Lost on an Ice-floe (1826), In Search of the Beothuk (1828), Along the ‘English Coast’ (1828), Aboriginal Health (1830), A Dance in Bay St. George (1833), How Many Beothuks Were There? (1841), Customs of the Colonists and Natives (1847), In Port in St. John’s (1849), The Real Cost of a Meal of Fish (1853), An Official Diplomatic Visit (1858), An Ethnographic Expedition (1858), Origins of the French Population (1858), An Irish Utopia in Bay St. George (1859), Some Political Observations (1859), French Fishing Operations (1867), Population Increase versus French Fishing Rights (1873), All Kinds of Weather (1883), Social Practices in St. John’s (1883), The Influence of the Clergy (1883), The Railway (1883), The Monetary System (1884), The Winter Guardian in Croque Harbour (1885), A Walk Around Bonne Bay (1886), Between the Icebergs and the Mosquitoes (1886), Conversing with the Dearly Departed (1886), A Tour of Inspection (1889), Social Geography according to an Anarchist (1890), The Rise of Tuberculosis (1892), New Mineral Deposits (1894), Fish Farming in Dildo (1894), Bankers and Telegraph Operators in St. Pierre (1895), A Brief Pathology of Newfoundlanders (1896), Mining and Anglo-French Negotiations (1900), Selling Whale By-Products (1904), New Signs of Prosperity (1904), What is a Cod-Trap? (1904), Social, Political and Commercial Life in St. John’s (1907), Newfoundlanders’ Sense of Individuality (1907).

Such a range of subjects will undoubtedly ignite sparks of interest at every page; likewise, the writers represented and their fields of expertise: from botanists to physicians, a naval surgeon, a first mate, a naval captain, a prince, several journalists, diplomats, scientists, geographers, artists, and a trade attaché. While the majority of the authors are unknown to most North American readers today, there are some whose names in connection with Newfoundland — or rather *Terre-Neuve* — such as John James Audubon, A.-J.-M. Bachelot de la Pylaie or C.-J.-A. Carpon should inspire considerable curiosity.

All the excerpts are reproduced in the original French; the detailed and sometimes technical descriptions will tax readers’ linguistic skills, and especially students unaccustomed to nineteenth-century literary French, given the relatively small print and density of material on each page. It might perhaps have been useful

to include a glossary of terms, particularly those related to the French fishery, as well as an index of names and places. That said, the variety, liveliness, and occasional humour of the selections, and their relative shortness make it well worth the effort.

This anthology is a wonderful opportunity for present and future generations who are interested in Newfoundland history — provided they have the requisite linguistic ability or just desire to brush up on their rusty French — to immerse themselves into the French past of this area. It provides a valuable selection of samples from abundant, though largely untapped, historical sources. This is a major contribution, a veritable journey of recovery of a Newfoundland that, while still fairly close to us in time, has remained nearly entirely hidden for so long. Rompkey has connected many of the pieces that serve as an enlightening guide book of French Newfoundland in the nineteenth century.

Scott Jamieson
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Richard Rohmer. *Raleigh on the Rocks: The Canada Shipwreck of HMS Raleigh*. St. John's: Creative Publishing, 2003, ISBN 1-89429-446-7

ON 8 AUGUST 1922 the new Cavendish class light cruiser HMS *Raleigh* drove aground on the rocks below the Amour Point lighthouse on the Labrador coast. She was en route to Forteau Bay, making 12 knots in fog and rain squalls, with a strong wind from the south west. By the time breaking surf was spotted from the bridge it was too late, and *Raleigh* plowed her way onto the reef. No amount of reversing of engines and winching on cables and anchors would free her. Meanwhile the sea worked the hull against the bottom, grinding her ever tighter into the rock. Soon *Raleigh* was a total loss. And almost as quickly her cutlery, crockery, china, and furnishings graced homes from Blanc Sablon to Nain, as *Raleigh* herself entered into the folklore of the Labrador.

The story of the cruiser's loss is the subject of Major General Richard Rohmer's slightly mistitled *Raleigh on the Rocks: The Canada Shipwreck of HMS Raleigh*, a good account of the stranding and the subsequent events. Rohmer starts with an informative description of *Raleigh*'s North American cruise in 1922, but quite quickly gets to the events of 8 August as Captain Arthur Bottomley made his way towards Forteau Bay on the Labrador — not the Canadian — coast for some salmon fishing. What follows in Rohmer's book is a bare bones story, told largely without embellishment, context, or analysis. Rohmer focuses instead on the technical aspects of the grounding, the weather, course steered, impact, the courts of enquiry and courts martial, salvage attempts, and later destruction of the wreck and its ammunition. Once it became clear that *Raleigh* was never going to get free, the