

W. Gillies Ross — *This Distant and Unsurveyed Country: A Woman's Winter at Baffin Island, 1857–1858*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997. Pp. xli, 258.

Thanks to researchers like W. Gillies Ross, our knowledge of the economic, technological, and political underpinnings of Arctic whaling has been greatly enhanced in recent years. Similarly, the biology and migratory habits of the primary resource, the Greenland Right or Bowhead (*B. mysticetus*), have been well studied, as have the seasonal characteristics of wind, sea, and ice which heavily influenced the overall character of the industry. The human response to these environmental stimuli — the Northern whale fishery — is also relatively well understood. The annual repetitions, the seasonal rhythms, the spatial and temporal patterns of individual hunting grounds, and the technology, techniques, and skills required of successful whalers have all been examined at considerable length. Much is thus known about Northern whaling from its origins at the beginning of the seventeenth century through to its final demise just prior to World War I.

The history of this hazardous trade has been one of evolution through a series of phases defined by spatial expansion, technological innovation, the introduction of overwintering expeditions, the establishment of land-stations, and eventually the subsidization of the industry through bartering with indigenous people and the hunting of substitute species. Much of this information, however, exists in bits and pieces — as scientific journal articles, conference papers, and unpublished academic theses.

While numerous “Arctic” logbooks, journals, diaries, and other accounts have been published, few have been as successful as *This Distant and Unsurveyed Country* in providing a holistic view of at least one component of this complicated trade. Fewer still have had editors with both the intimate knowledge and narrative skill to present this information in an engaging fashion. It is especially remarkable that Gill Ross, given the material at his disposal, has produced such a *tour de force*. Not only are there serious gaps in Margaret Penny's journal, but hers is a peculiar perspective skewed by gender and her status as the expedition leader's spouse. Furthermore, its setting, an 1857–1858 overwintering voyage in Cumberland Sound, was a precursor to a relatively insignificant phase of Arctic whaling that emerged as owners and masters attempted to revitalize the ailing pelagic fishery in Davis Strait and Baffin Bay.

Additionally, this is but a sanitized version of the journal Margaret Penny might have written. As Ross explains, she “simply described what she saw when she felt like it”. Unfortunately, she did not “feel” inclined to record much of any real substance and thus fails to provide sufficient background information “for the researcher to understand the significance of [her] experiences and impressions”. While this may have been simply a lack of commitment, it is just as likely due to the fact that the diary was a collaborative effort with her husband, Captain William Penny, Scotland's best known whaler and a leading Arctic explorer, who appears to have scrutinized her entries closely. She was also a product of a strict Victorian upbringing and socialized within Aberdeen's small, but close-knit and influential

whaling fraternity. She was probably conscious, therefore, of family and friends who might have occasion to read her diary. For whatever reason, detailed descriptions of the whaling process and the often sensitive symbiotic relationships that existed between members of the expedition and their indigenous hosts are scarce. In fact, potentially controversial topics are ignored. The result is a thin and often tedious journal which under normal circumstances would not have found a publisher.

Therein, however, lies the real strength of this volume. Simply put, it is Gill Ross's book, not Margaret Penny's, and the diary accounts for a meagre 1:5 ratio in terms of actual text. Margaret's diary, without an extensive commentary, as Ross correctly points out, "would raise many unanswered questions and frustrate the reader". To overcome this problem, he uses the journal as a medium to describe in impressive detail the various aspects of what was a multifaceted operation pitting man against a harsh, inhospitable, and often dangerous environment.

Ross is Canada's foremost expert on the Northern whale fishery and is a leading authority on global whaling in general. He uses his extensive knowledge of the industry, the climate and geography of Canada's Arctic, the struggle for survival in the North, and the relationships between Europeans and Inuit to paint an intimate picture, not only of this particular expedition, but of Arctic whaling as a whole. Ross divides Penny's journal into chapters and draws heavily on the logbooks of the *Lady Franklin* and *Sophia*, as well as detailed reports prepared by Br. Mattheus Warmow, a Moravian missionary who accompanied the Pennys to Baffin Island, to craft a text chock-full of detail that "explains or elaborates on some of the events, topics, places, ships, and people she has mentioned". The only real quibble I have with *This Distant and Unsurveyed Country* is the sometimes irksome repetition between Penny's journal and Ross's narrative. It might have been better to have simply reproduced the journal as an appendix, or to have left it out altogether.

Ross uses Margaret Penny's diary to provide a comprehensive account of one important facet of Arctic whaling. In my view, this is a well-documented research publication of the very highest order. It can only be hoped that he will apply this effective technique to other phases of Arctic whaling or, better still, write a definitive historiography of the trade.

Chelsey Sanger
Memorial University of Newfoundland

Angelika E. Sauer and Matthias Zimmer, eds. — *A Chorus of Different Voices: German-Canadian Identities*. New York: Peter Lang, 1998. Pp. x, 244.

Thirteen essays of different disciplines are included in this volume: scholars of history, anthropology, language studies, and political science contributed. The authors include long-time accomplished researchers as well as graduate students just starting out in the field of German-Canadian studies. Their topics vary, however.

In "The Social Construction of Identity" Dieter Haselbach summarizes philosophical and sociological concepts of identity. Ethnicity, as one of the most prominent