Death on the Ice and the Newfoundland Imaginary: Print Culture on the Periphery

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“Cultural action, the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones.”¹

The sealing disaster of 1914, in which 78 men from the S.S. *Newfoundland* died on the ice floes off the northeast coast of Newfoundland, remains one of the most powerfully evocative events in the province’s history. Frustrated by his ship’s lack of progress (the *Newfoundland* had become jammed in the ice with no seals in sight), Captain Westbury Kean sent his crew of 132 sealers several miles over the ice to the *Stephano*, the ship of his father, Abram Kean. Wes hoped his father would direct his men to seals and pick them up in the evening, but instead, upon reaching the *Stephano* after their four-and-half-hour journey, the men were ordered to walk further to a patch of seals and return to their own ship for the night. Given these directions, the *Newfoundland*’s second hand, George Tuff, did not object. The weather, which had been mild, was turning colder, and, by nightfall, the men were lost and struggling in heavy snow, and no ships knew they were missing. The *Newfoundland* did not have a wireless (it had been removed as a cost-cutting measure by Harvey and Company, the firm that owned the ship and reaped the profits from the pelts), and so Wes Kean could not contact his father the next day, nor the day after that, when his men failed to reappear. After two days and two nights on the ice, with little shelter and inadequate food and clothing, most of the *Newfoundland* men

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1 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 7.

had died, their frozen bodies retaining the postures of their last acts: praying, embracing family members, or lying down for a moment's rest. The shocking death toll prompted two judicial inquiries into the disaster, neither of which pacified the public, for whom the events exposed the inhuman conditions the sealers routinely endured and the general indifference to their welfare exhibited by the companies they served.

Today, the fullest account of the *Newfoundland* disaster is the bestseller *Death on the Ice: The Great Newfoundland Sealing Disaster of 1914* (1972) by Cassie Brown (1919–1986) with Harold Horwood (1923–2006). Written by Newfoundlanders – Brown was a journalist, publisher, and author based in St John's, Horwood a nationally known fiction and non-fiction author – and published in Toronto and New York in the period that witnessed the intensifying international controversy over the Canadian seal hunt, *Death on the Ice* is in itself a significant artefact of Newfoundland culture, both as a site that constructs Newfoundland identity and as a milestone in the history of Newfoundland literature.

As a work of Newfoundland history, *Death on the Ice* was a surprise popular and economic success. Published by Doubleday Canada and Doubleday (New York) in the fall of 1972, it sold over 10,000 copies in its first 18 months, with half its sales in the United States.² A suspenseful account written in a simple journalistic prose style, it was serialized in the London (UK) *Sunday Express* in 1972, followed by other publications in Australia, the United States, and Norway, and abridged in the English-Canadian edition of *Reader's Digest* in November 1974, with the Canadian French-language version following in October 1975 and other translations appearing in the Finnish, Danish, Norwegian, French, Dutch, Japanese, Spanish, Latin American, Portuguese, Brazilian, Chinese, and South African editions of the magazine between 1974 and 1976.³ The full work also

2 Cassie Brown to Anne Elmo, 25 August 1973, file 2.02.001, Cassie Brown literary papers, Coll-115, Archives and Special Collections, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St John's. All further archival references are to this collection.

3 *Death on the Ice* appeared in four instalments in the London *Sunday Express* between 19 November and 10 December 1972. According to *Canada Writes! The Members' Book of the Writers' Union of Canada*, ed. K.A. Hamilton (Toronto: Writers' Union of Canada, 1977), it was also serialized in *The Sun* (Sydney, Australia), *The Herald* (Melbourne, Australia), *The Detroit Evening News* (Detroit, USA), and the Norwegian magazine *Vi Menn*. For information on publication in *Reader's Digest*, see Jane Starr to Betty Corson, 15 April 1976,

appeared in Spanish translation from an Argentinean press in 1976.⁴ In Newfoundland, where the book was an immediate bestseller, *Death on the Ice* was heralded as a landmark publication. In 1974, it became the first Newfoundland title (and among the first Canadian titles) to be adopted as a core textbook on the provincial high-school English curriculum, where it remains to this day. The success of *Death on the Ice* in the trade and educational markets (it served for briefer periods on curricula in other provinces⁵ and was purchased by school libraries throughout Canada and the United States) led Doubleday Canada to break with its usual arrangement with Toronto's General Publishing for reprint rights and publish its own paperback edition in January 1974. Never out of print and still selling steadily, *Death on the Ice* is today one of the most widely read depictions of Newfoundland in and outside the province.

This essay investigates the writing, publication, and reception of *Death on the Ice*, in order to explore the interrelations of print culture and cultural identity in Newfoundland in the mid to late twentieth century. Taking a cue from Benedict Anderson, who theorized the function of publishing in the building of "imagined communities," I argue that *Death on the Ice* is an important site of shared reading for Newfoundlanders, a text that has been deployed and interpreted as an expression of a common cultural heritage. As Homi Bhabha reminds us, however, cultures and communities are never discreet and homogenous entities, and most expressions of communal identity emerge through what Bhabha deems the interstices, "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference" or "in-between spaces," in which identities are negotiated through the processes of contestation and collaboration.⁶ As I will show, *Death on the Ice* was the product of a research, writing, and editing process that negotiated diverse cultural values and knowledges, and appeared at a moment when Newfoundland cultural producers were recovering and reinventing

file 9.03.001. The abridgement was also included in the anthology *Great Canadian Adventures* (Montreal: Reader's Digest Association [Canada], 1976), 296–321.

4 Cassie Brown with Harold Horwood, *Muerte en el hielo* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Cuarto Mundo, 1976).

5 In a letter of 1977, Brown wrote that *Death on the Ice* was on the curriculum in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, and Alberta (Brown to Bill Erving, 19 May 1977, file 2.02.011).

6 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 2.

vernacular traditions in an artistic “renaissance” in which print played a supporting role. While *Death on the Ice* has remained an influential book, a text that has become naturalized as “a fixed part of the cultural apparatus” in Newfoundland and Labrador,⁷ as a literary text that represents the culmination of a local writer’s long apprenticeship, it is almost invisible.⁸ With this in mind, I also examine the early career of Cassie Brown, a writer whose literary reputation – at first dwarfed by that of her co-author – now appears to have been eclipsed by the very themes she explored.

Representations of Sealing in the Literature of Newfoundland

Joining Canada in 1949 after a complicated history of colonial dependence and self-governance, the Newfoundland of the twentieth century laid claim to a cultural mythology that was both bolstered and bedevilled by the printed word. Inheriting a literature dating from the 1500s overwhelmingly made up of works written by and for outsiders,⁹ the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, as Pat Byrne has pointed out, “are ... used to reading (and hearing and seeing) exoteric depictions of themselves and their province and their way of life.”¹⁰ This eavesdropping has all but confirmed a suspicion that Newfoundlanders have not been known as great producers or

7 Shane O’Dea, “Culture and Country: The Role of the Arts and Heritage in the Nationalist Revival in Newfoundland.” *Newfoundland Studies* 19, no. 2 (2003): 382.

8 Interest in the life and career of Cassie Brown appears to be reviving today, however. A one-woman play, entitled *Cassie Brown: My Life in Non-Fiction*, written by Joan Sullivan, was produced as part of the Grand Bank Theatre Festival in 2009.

9 See William Barker, “Books and Reading in Newfoundland and in Labrador,” in *History of the Book in Canada, Volume One: Beginnings to 1840*, ed. Patricia Lockhart Fleming, Gilles Gallichan, and Yvan Lamonde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 361–68; William Barker and Sandra Hannaford, “Towards a History of the Book in Newfoundland,” Background paper for the *History of the Book in Canada/Histoire du livre et de l’imprimé au Canada* project, http://www.hbic.library.utoronto.ca/fconfnfld_en.htm, accessed 29 June 2009; and Patrick O’Flaherty, *The Rock Observed: Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979).

10 Pat Byrne, “Seas, Seals, and Shipping: Three Exoteric Literary Depictions of Newfoundland,” in *Bean Blossom to Bannerman: Odyssey of a Folklorist: A Festschrift for Neil V. Rosenberg*, ed. Martin Lovelace, Peter Narváez, and Diane Tye (St John’s: Memorial University of Newfoundland, Folklore and Language Publications, 2005), 87–88.

consumers of print. At the time of Confederation in 1949, with most of the population living in a subsistence economy, literacy rates in the province lagged well behind the Canadian national average, and the university and public library systems were in embryonic form. In 1956, Margaret Duley (herself a novelist, though not one who enjoyed a strong local following) observed, "there is little Newfoundland literature on library shelves, scant poetry and the smallest output of romances highlighting four hundred and fifty years of local living." Like other commentators before and after her, Duley attributed the dearth of printed literature to Newfoundlanders' seemingly adversarial relationship with the natural environment, "a harsh background where man was forced to fight for his existence before the thought of the arts ever crossed his mind."¹¹

By the 1970s, however, numerous critics were re-evaluating the place of arts in Newfoundland culture, as the continuing vibrancy of folk traditions gained new publics. A backlash against the government-administered programs of resettlement,¹² the coming of age of a university-educated generation, and, undoubtedly, the spirit of the times led to what has been called the "Newfoundland Renaissance," a cultural explosion described by Sandra Gwyn in 1976 as a "populist activist movement ... that attempts both to celebrate the past and to build a democratic future." As described by Gwyn, this movement shared some characteristics with Québec's Quiet Revolution, in particular its artists' celebration of local dialect and secular traditions. While Newfoundland writing and publishing were part of this renaissance, their impact was more self-contained than that of the visual and performing arts, whose practitioners, including David Blackwood, Mary Pratt, and Codco, were becoming known across Canada and beyond. As Gwyn writes: "Newfoundland prose and poetry, when it reaches the mainland, travels with considerably less assurance than theatre or painting."¹³ Though a vibrant local

11 Margaret Duley, "Glimpses into Local Literature," *Atlantic Guardian* 13, no. 7 (July 1956): 20.

12 Between 1954 and 1975, with the goals of supplying amenities, industrializing, and "modernizing," the provincial government carried out three programs of resettlement that depopulated over 300 Newfoundland outposts. See Memorial University of Newfoundland, Maritime History Archive, "No Great Future': Government Sponsored Resettlement in Newfoundland and Labrador since Confederation," <http://www.mun.ca/mha/resettlement/>.

13 Sandra Gwyn, "The Newfoundland Renaissance," *Saturday Night* (April 1976): 40, 45.

literary culture was beginning to flourish, as the forming of the Newfoundland Writers' Guild in 1968 and the appearance of publishing houses, such as Jespersen Press (est. 1969), Breakwater Books (est. 1973), and Creative Publishers (est. 1983), illustrate, much of the resultant print literature circulated for a large part locally. While several literary achievements, notably Harold Horwood's *Tomorrow Will Be Sunday* (1966), Percy Janes' *House of Hate* (1970), and especially the Newfoundland works of Farley Mowat,¹⁴ all published outside the province, were harbingers of the arrival of Newfoundland literature on the North American scene and catalysts for the local production, it was only by the late 1990s with the appearance of two internationally celebrated Newfoundland novels, *The Shipping News* (1993) by American author E. Annie Proulx and Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), that Newfoundland literature was truly on the literary map.¹⁵

Within the larger picture of history of print representations of Newfoundland culture, the creative and documentary works focusing on the sealing industry occupy a key position. Following and continuing with the participants in a long oral tradition, artists have depicted the seal hunt since the late nineteenth century in a body of works that has grown to encompass written literature, visual art, film, and drama.¹⁶ In recent decades, the meanings of the seal

14 Born in 1921 in Belleville, Ontario, and arriving in Newfoundland in the 1960s, Mowat exerted an immense influence on writing and publishing in Newfoundland. From 1968, with the publication of *This Rock Within the Sea: A Heritage Lost* (Boston; Toronto: Little, Brown, 1968), Mowat came to be seen as "the chief literary interpreter of modern Newfoundland to the world at large" (O'Flaherty, *Rock Observed*, 177).

15 For examinations of the growth of literary publishing in Newfoundland, see Sandrine Ferré, *L'Édition au Canada atlantique: Le défi de publier une région* (Paris: Collection des thèses du Centre d'Études canadiennes de l'Université de Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle, no. 5, 1999), esp. 220–29; Sandrine Ferré-Rode, "Atlantic Canada," in *History of the Book in Canada, Volume Three: 1918–1980*, ed. Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 178–81; and Roy MacSkimming, *The Perilous Trade: Publishing Canada's Writers* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2003), 265–67. Danielle Fuller provides an interesting discussion of the literary culture that has grown with the Newfoundland Writers' Guild, in *Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

16 See Shannon Ryan and Larry Small, comp., *Haulin' Rope and Gaff: Songs and Poetry in the History of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery* (St John's: Breakwater Books, 1978), as well as Cynthia Lawson, 'Bloody Decks and a Bumper Crop': *The*

hunt for Newfoundland cultural producers have been multiplied and heightened by the international furor over sealing that began mounting in the 1960s and intensified in the 1970s with the wide-scale media campaigns of such groups as the International Fund for Animal Welfare (founded 1969). While in Newfoundland there has existed a range of views about the hunt's cultural import and its environmental and economic feasibility, there has also been frustration and anger over the demonization of the Newfoundland sealer, and by extension the Newfoundlander, who has become in the rhetoric of the anti-sealing groups a "savage" and "barbaric" "murderer," the very figure of primitivism that has continued to be evoked to the present day, as evinced by activist Paul Watson's recent characterization of sealers as

Rhetoric of Sealing Counter-Protest (St John's: ISER, 1979), for a sampling of the oral tradition. Other creative/documentary works include: Joseph Hatton and Rev. M. Moses Harvey, *Newfoundland, The Oldest British Colony: Its History, Its Present Condition, and Its Prospects in the Future* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1883); Wilfred T. Grenfell, *Vikings of To-Day, or, Life and Medical Work Among the Fishermen of Labrador* (New York; Toronto: F.H. Revell, [1896?]); E.J. Pratt, "The Ice-Floes," *Canadian Forum* 2, no. 1 (April 1922): 591–93; Rockwell Kent, *N by E* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1930), chap. 26; Varick Frissell, dir., *The Viking* (film, 1931); William Howe Green, *The Wooden Walls Among the Ice Floes: Telling the Romance of the Newfoundland Seal Fishery* (London: Hutchinson, 1933); Joseph Schull, *The Sinker: A Novel* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1968); Farley Mowat, *Wake of the Great Sealers*, with prints and drawings by David Blackwood (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1973); The Mummery Troupe, *They Club Seals, Don't They?* (1978), in *Stars in the Sky Morning: Collective Plays of Newfoundland and Labrador*, ed. Helen Peters (St John's: Killick Press, 1996), 1–47; Michael Crummey, "Newfoundland Sealing Disaster," in *Hard Light* (London, ON: Brick Books, 1998), 114; Anne Troake, *My Ancestors Were Rogues and Murderers* (Montreal: National Film Board of Canada, 2005); and Paul Butler, *Hero* (Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing, 2009); a statue depicting lost sealers is currently being proposed for the town of Elliston, NL (see Everton McLean, "New Monument to Honour Lost Sealers," *The Telegram* [St John's], 18 April 2009, p. A11). Histories and memoirs include: Abram Kean, *Old and Young Ahead* (London: Heath, Cranton, 1935; repr. St John's: Flanker Press, 2000); Michael J. Dwyer, *Over the Side, Mickey: A Sealer's First Hand Account of the Newfoundland Seal Hunt* (Halifax, NS: Nimbus Publishing, 1998); and over a dozen titles published in Newfoundland by local publishing houses and independently from the 1970s. An analysis of the representation of the seal hunt in film is provided in Noreen Golfman, "Documenting the Seal Fishery: A Short History of Newfoundland Film," in *Rain/Drizzle/Fog: Film and Television in Atlantic Canada*, ed. Darrell Varga (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009), 67–81. Chris Brookes offers a lively discussion of the "theatre versus theatre" manoeuvres in the sealing wars of the 1970s in *A Public Nuisance: A History of the Mummery Troupe* (St John's: ISER Books, 1988), 194–209.

“sadistic baby killers” and “cigarette-smoking ape[s] with [clubs].”¹⁷ While such views contrast sharply with a tradition in Newfoundland that has honoured sealing as a difficult and dangerous way of making a living, spokespeople offering alternative perspectives on the hunt and its practitioners have found themselves severely outclassed by the media resources of anti-sealing groups.¹⁸ In recent decades, one might argue that it is the seal hunt – over and above even the Canadian institution of the Newfie joke¹⁹ – that has made many Newfoundlanders acutely sensitive to the politics of representation, who speaks for whom, and who has access to the resources necessary for cultural production and communication.²⁰

17 Paul Watson, quoted in A.F.P., “Sea Shepherd Sparks Anger over Sealer Death Comments,” *Australian Broadcasting Corporation News*, 5 April 2008, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/04/05/2208711.htm>, accessed 21 July 2009.

18 Ray Guy notes that in 1974 the IFAW hired the New York advertising firm used by Coca-Cola to coordinate its “Stop the Seal Hunt” campaign; see Ray Guy, “Seal Wars,” *Canadian Geographic* 120, no. 2 (January/February 2000), http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/magazine/jfoo/feature_seal.asp. The body of anti-sealing print and other media material is substantial and varied, and has not, to my knowledge, been surveyed.

19 On the Newfie joke, see Christie Davies, “The Newfoundland Joke: A Canadian Phenomenon Viewed in a Comparative International Perspective,” *Humor* 10 (1997): 137–64; and Pat Byrne, “*Blason Populaire* as Tourist Commodity: The ‘Newfie’ Stereotype in Newfoundland Popular Culture” (unpublished paper delivered at the American Folklore Society Meetings, Memphis, TN, October 1999).

20 The sealing controversy is an important site for the study of developing understandings of ecology and socio-economics on a global scale. In *The Cultural Politics of Fur* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), Julia V. Emberley “traces the discursive and nondiscursive practices that institutionalize, subvert, and transgress the meanings of fur ... in order to understand the contest over the meanings and values of fur as a struggle between people” (xiii), a discussion which touches on the impact of anti-sealing campaigns on Inuit communities in the Canadian North (35–8). While Emberley closely focuses on the markets and meanings of fur as clothing, rather than on the larger trade in animal products (the commercial interest in seals, for example, has been tied historically to rising and falling demands for oil, leather, fur, and to a much lesser extent meat), her analysis highlights how the manifestation of the dominant ideologies of the environmental movement has framed and/or ignored the participation of numerous constituencies (factory workers, Aboriginal peoples, women) in the fur trade. The Inuit of Labrador have for centuries engaged in sealing as a subsistence activity and have taken part in the commercial industry at least since the 1940s; see Nunatsiavut Government, “Press Release,” 14 March 2006, <http://www.nunatsiavut.com/>

The shifts in print traditions centring on Newfoundland over the last century, as well as the pertinence of sealing as a topic, are illustrated by the publication history of another, less well-known book on the sealing industry. *Vikings of the Ice: Being the Log of a Tenderfoot on the Great Newfoundland Seal Hunt* (1924), written by the American travel writer George Allan England, describes England's experiences on board a Newfoundland sealing vessel in 1922. Based on a series of articles originally published in the *Saturday Evening Post*, England's lively and humorous work reveals an observant eye (and ear) for local customs and dialect, and may be viewed within the larger trend of adventure writing that garnered wide appeal in the early twentieth century, and in which the exotic "northern" locale of Newfoundland and Labrador figured prominently for readers across North America (and to some extent Britain) though the writings of such authors as Wilfred Grenfell, Norman Duncan, and Dillon Wallace.²¹ When England's work was republished by Montreal's Tundra Books in 1969, however, Newfoundland's pre-industrial otherness appeared in a decidedly different light. With a new introduction by Ebbitt Cutler, a new title (*The Greatest Hunt in the World*), and an updated cover showing a seal pup crying an oversized teardrop of blood, the repackaged text invited readers to ponder the connection between "the Newfoundlander who accepted meekly for centuries poverty, illiteracy, exploitation, irresponsible government, and almost-chronic economic depression and the sealer who each year immersed himself in a blood bath unequalled elsewhere in the world."²² Interestingly, in 2010, England's work is slated to make yet another comeback – this time under its original title and with a smiling sealer on the cover – in a new edition by Rattling Books, a St John's audiobooks publisher founded in 2003. With this latest edition, *Vikings of the Ice* completes a migration from exoteric text to an artefact of local history reclaimed by local producers – a migration that has become increasingly common due to the cultural mandates of some local publishers.²³

pdfs/Seal.industry.pdf, accessed 17 August 2009. They do not figure in the events recounted in *Death on the Ice*.

21 See J.T.H. Connor, "Putting the 'Grenfell Effect' in its Place: Medical Tales and Autobiographical Narratives in Twentieth-century Newfoundland and Labrador," in this issue of *Papers/Cahiers* 48 (Spring 2010).

22 Ebbitt Cutler, "Introduction," in *The Greatest Hunt in the World* by George Allan England (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1969), viii.

23 Breakwater Books, for example, was founded in 1973 with a view to trade and educational publishing centred on Newfoundland. In an interview conducted

As a work that appeared at a height of the sealing wars and before the full impact of the cultural “renaissance,” *Death on the Ice* quickly became a source of pride in the popular imagination both as an internationally successful cultural export and as a commemoration of an historical event that would come to be seen as emblematic of the province’s labour history. Written as a novelistic popular history, with copious dialogue and a vividly drawn cast of “characters,” the book begins with a description of the *Newfoundland* leaving port on 9 March 1914, a short history of the settling of Newfoundland and of the sealing industry, and an examination of the work conditions of the sealers of the day. The narrative then closely focuses on the days leading up to the disaster and the 53 (or more) hours the sealers spent on the ice. These key chapters offer a cinematic montage of the fates of specific men and boys, recounting their actions and exchanges as recreated by Cassie Brown from the testimony recorded at the public inquiries of 1914 and her own interviews conducted with survivors in the 1960s. The text concludes with the rescue effort, the arrival in port, and a brief summation of the inquiries. Accompanied by 50 photographs – some from public archives and some, never before seen by the public, from Brown’s personal collection – the text is dispassionately narrated and fast-paced. It uses the Newfoundland vernacular, especially, but not solely, in the dialogue of the sealers, with whom the narrative voice is closely aligned: thus, seals and sealing are “swiles” and “swiling”; older men are respectfully addressed as “skipper”; and bad weather is “dirty.” There is also an attempt to phonetically reproduce Newfoundland accents, as in “b’ys,” “starm,” and “ahl rate.” Brown’s approach creates a vivid and sympathetic portrait of the sealers by focusing on their resourcefulness and endurance, the value of their traditional knowledge, and the strength of their family and community bonds. Significantly, although Brown would later maintain that she had endeavoured to avoid creating a prejudiced portrayal of Abram Kean, the imposing sealing captain and former member of the Newfoundland House of Assembly (the stronghold of the elite) at whose feet many laid the blame for the

in 1993, Breakwater founder Clyde Rose commented on the significance of the company name: “Literally, a breakwater is a wall of rock that is constructed in a fishing village that is opened to the sea. It gives some protection to the smaller boats and the harbour against the raging elements. The ‘breakwater’ that we created was an intellectual barrier against this infusion of mainland and American culture that was coming into our country” (qtd. in Ferré, *L’Édition au Canada atlantique*, 222).

78 deaths, her roving narrative perspective remains faithfully with the sealers and the Kean sons (Wes's brother Joe was the captain of the *Florizel*, another sealing ship in the vicinity): of all the men implicated in the disaster, only the Old Man's thoughts are hidden from the reader.

Described by one Canadian literary critic as an attempt at "a candid retrieval of the truth of the past" and "a dedicated work of regional conscience and memory,"²⁴ *Death on the Ice*, though seldom discussed in Canadian literary histories, remains an extremely significant work for Newfoundland and Labrador. The product of a research, writing, and editing process that negotiated a multiplicity of perspectives, including those of the surviving sealers who related their experiences, the professional writers Cassie Brown and Harold Horwood, and their Toronto publisher, as well as the anticipated responses of readers across North America, *Death on the Ice* reveals much about Newfoundland's ongoing struggle to "signify from the periphery"²⁵ of the established North American publishing centres. The portrait of Newfoundland that would emerge would resonate strongly with local readers at a time when the province's artists were recognizing rural and working-class culture as a cornerstone of Newfoundland identity and as a key ingredient in building "a democratic future" for the people of the province.

The Early Career of Cassie Brown

Best remembered today as a chronicler of marine disasters – her later works include *A Winter's Tale: The Wreck of the 'Florizel'* (1976) and *Standing into Danger: A Dramatic Story of Shipwreck and Rescue* (1979) – Cassie Brown took a long road to book publishing, then, as now, the benchmark for professional authorship. With few role models and fewer educational opportunities for writers, Brown followed a career path that is interesting for what it reveals about the conditions of authorship (particularly, female authorship) in Newfoundland at mid-century. *Death on the Ice*, published when she was 53, was her first published full-length work, one with which she crossed boundaries as a woman exploring the masculine domain of ice fields and as a

24 Terry Whalen, "Atlantic Possibilities," *Essays on Canadian Writing* 20 (1980–81):

54.

25 Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 3.

St John's businesswoman and professional journalist documenting the working culture of the outports.

Born into a merchant family in the small community of Rose Blanche, on the southwest coast of Newfoundland, Cassie Eileen Horwood (no relation to Harold Horwood) moved to St John's as a teenager with her parents and siblings following the collapse of the family business in 1930. After completing high school, she worked as a stenographer for several St John's firms over a number of years and married in 1945, staying in the work force until the birth of her son, Derek, in 1947. Her second child, daughter Christine, was born in 1950.

Having written her first novel (never published) and contributed a number of lifestyle articles to a local newspaper in her teenage years, Brown had ambitions to write professionally from an early age and set her sights on popular fiction. With no creative writing courses available in the province, in 1949 she enrolled in a correspondence course offered by the Palmer Institute of Authorship in Hollywood, CA, which also provided a consultation service geared to helping writers break into the magazine market. While it does not appear that Brown attempted to publish in American magazines (remarkably, the settings and intended audiences for her early literary projects were consistently local), in 1954 she entered a short story in the government-sponsored Newfoundland Arts and Letters Competition, then in its third year. Her story, "Black Rock Sunker," a romance told from the point of view of a Newfoundland teenager "powerful big for a feller of fourteen" (38), won first place and was published in June 1955 in the *Newfoundland Quarterly* (est. 1901), the well-respected outlet for local writers that predated and survived the handful of little magazines that had begun springing up in St John's in the years following the Second World War.²⁶

While print opportunities for creative writers were limited, broadcasting offered paid work and was a relatively accessible avenue for women writers like Brown. Between 1955 and 1957, she wrote short stories, many of them romances, for the radio program *Newfoundland Story Hour*, produced by the local branch of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and hosted by John Murphy (later mayor of St John's). In later years, Brown would often recall that it was Murphy's advice to "cut out the love stuff" that led

26 O'Flaherty, *Rock Observed*, 149–51.

her to try her hand at different material.²⁷ It was at this point that she began writing plays for radio, entering and winning the Arts and Letters Competition several more times in the Radio Scripts category. From 1960, Brown also wrote and acted for the Newfoundland and Atlantic School Broadcasts, programs intended to supplement the public education system. In total, she contributed over 60 scripts, writing everything from the “Adaptations from Literature” program, to an original series called “Newfoundland Folksongs,” which proved at the time to be more popular with at-home listeners than with teachers.²⁸

Brown would have to create her own opportunity to publish romances. Between August 1962 and January 1965, taking over from another local writer, Ron Pumphrey, Brown wrote for, edited, and published *St. John's Woman* (later *Newfoundland Woman*), which she, with the help of family members, produced on a mimeograph machine and distributed throughout St John's via a network of corner stores and paper-carriers.²⁹ As indicated by Pumphrey's tagline, “The magazine that's HOME MADE FOR THE HOMEMAKER” (dropped by Brown), *St. John's Woman* targeted a popular female readership. While Pumphrey offered tabloid-style journalism on local issues, Brown shifted the focus to entertainment. Most issues carried recipes, jokes, lonely hearts and astrology columns, and serialized stories written by the editor herself, usually romances set in Newfoundland against the backdrop of notable historical events, such as the Great (St John's) Fire of 1892 and the tsunami of 1929.³⁰ Both *St. John's Woman* and *Newfoundland Woman* also carried non-fiction stories “as told to” Brown by local contributors, and by 1964 the magazine was actively looking for true “Stories of Newfoundland Adventure.”

By the mid-1960s, the beginnings of the “Newfoundland Renaissance” were already stirring the burgeoning writing community,

27 Cassie Brown, “The Interview,” in *Writing the Sea* (St John's: Flanker Press, 2005), 145.

28 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Production Report: Newfoundland School Broadcasts, 1959–60* (St John's: CBC, 1960), 1a.

29 Later issues were professionally printed and also available by subscription throughout the province.

30 See, respectively, Cassie Brown, “Flaming Fury” in *St. John's Woman* (August 1962): [42–6]; (October 1962): [38–43, 48]; and (Nov 1962?): [31–36]; and “Tidal Wave,” in *St. John's Woman* (April 1963): 33–34, 36–40; (May 1963): 35–41; (June 1963): [33–39]; (July 1963): [32–33, 35–39]; and [August 1963], 19–21, 24–26.

although the institutions that would provide support and outlets for much of this work, such as the writers' guild and the local presses, were not yet on the scene. Having begun contributing to the St John's *Daily News* in 1959, Brown was now women's editor of the paper, a position that allowed her to strengthen her connections with the arts community. Through the newspaper she interviewed authors such as Ted Russell (best known for his outport character "Uncle Mose," a staple on local CBC radio between 1954 and 1960³¹) and Arthur Scammell (famous for the folk anthem "The Squid-Jiggin' Ground"), as well as the novelists and non-fiction authors Farley Mowat and Harold Horwood. Numerous writers, artists, and musicians also patronized the family-owned Karwood Cabins, located just outside St John's, which Brown managed from the mid-1960s following the death of her mother. In 1966, Brown resigned from the *Daily News* in order to concentrate on her own writing.

While Brown closely followed the careers of Mowat and Horwood, both of whom were publishing with large firms in Toronto, New York, and Boston, her turn to a prominent Toronto publisher with a book project appears to have been inspired by the path, not of an author but of a visual artist. In 1964, painter and printmaker David Blackwood read one of Brown's pieces in the *Daily News* and struck up a correspondence with the writer based on their shared interest in oral narrative and the seafaring life. Blackwood (originally of Wesleyville, on the northeast coast of Newfoundland, a community with strong ties to sealing) was then a student at the Ontario School of Art, where he had begun depicting the seal hunt in stark, mostly monochromatic etchings and drawings that memorialized individual sealing captains, ships, and events, including sealing disasters such as that of the *Newfoundland*. In its attention to material culture and visualization of the oral tradition (for example, in the incorporation of the vision of the stag, said to be an ice spirit, in numerous prints), Blackwood's "Lost Party Series" presented what has been seen as a "unrepentantly nationalistic"³² statement of Newfoundland identity that exalted the pre-modern (read pre-Confederation) masculine work culture of the northeast coast.

Blackwood's approach to his subject matter was crucial for Brown, who was stirred by the human drama Blackwood depicted

31 O'Flaherty, *Rock Observed*, 157. The first anthologies of Russell's stories were published by Breakwater Books in the 1970s.

32 O'Dea, "Culture and Country," 382.

("great drama," she would comment upon the frenetic movements of lost sealers in *The Retreat* [1964], "frightening" of his *Vision of the Lost Party* [1964]³³), and a dialectic developed as the artist and the author created their famous works. In September 1967, in a letter that discusses their various ideas for books, television programs, and visual art projects focused on the sealing industry, Blackwood wrote to Brown: "of the many people who *understand* exactly what I am trying to say in the [Lost Party] series I am sure you would head the list."³⁴ The feeling was evidently mutual: several years later, Blackwood would be commissioned to provide the cover illustration for *Death on the Ice*.

Blackwood's growing national reputation, as well as the excitement his art was generating in his native province, may have opened Brown's eyes to the possibility of a wider market for some of her own material. In 1966, surveying her body of journalism documenting shipwrecks and other tragic events (no "love stuff" whatsoever in the mix), she wrote to the prominent Toronto book publisher McClelland & Stewart with a proposal for a collection of non-fiction stories. Alluding to her connection with Blackwood and referencing the upcoming Canadian Centennial (1967) as a timely opportunity for a regional publication, she described her authorial territory: "In recent years I have become established as a color writer, travelling around our province interviewing people who have a story to tell."³⁵ Although McClelland & Stewart would turn down the proposal, Brown had identified her niche. The local appetite for Newfoundland adventure stories and the career of a visual artist had convinced her that there was a potentially wide-scale audience for non-fiction books that dealt directly with the history of Newfoundland.

The Making of *Death on the Ice*

Death on the Ice broke ground as a work of Newfoundland history by telling the event from the perspective of the men involved, a point of view achieved through a long and thorough research process that made extensive use of archival material and oral history. Brown's decision

33 Brown's handwritten notes on the exhibition program *David Blackwood Paintings, Drawings, Prints* (St John's: Memorial University Art Gallery, [1967?]), file 1.03.002.

34 David Blackwood to Brown, 16 September 1967, file 1.03.002.

35 Brown to McClelland & Stewart, 3 January 1966, file 2.02.07.

to send her manuscript to Toronto would lead to a re-envisioning of the book for a non-Newfoundland audience, and, along with this, a challenge to Brown's status as sole author. While Brown struggled, I would argue, successfully, to maintain authorial control over the text throughout the writing and editorial process, *Death on the Ice* would ultimately be published as work "by Cassie Brown with Harold Horwood," leading to years of speculation as to the extent of Horwood's involvement in the making of the bestseller. While Doubleday Canada deemed Horwood's involvement to be crucial in the creation and marketing of the book, this judgment appears to have been grounded in Brown's nearly negligible status as a regional newspaperwoman with few credentials as a literary author.

The *Newfoundland* disaster of 1914 was well known to many Newfoundlanders even by the 1950s. Accounts of it were given in some school textbooks and it had been featured on the Newfoundland School Broadcasts in 1952–53 in a series written by historian Michael Harrington.³⁶ Brown traced her first acquaintance with the disaster to the mid-1950s, when she read a short paragraph on it in *The Book of Newfoundland* that served as the basis of a story she wrote for *Newfoundland Story Hour*.³⁷

As the fiftieth anniversary of the tragedy approached in 1964, Brown, by then working at the *Daily News*, revisited her material in preparation for a feature story. "Death March" was accompanied by editorials, photographs, and personal reminiscences resulting from interviews Brown conducted with survivors Wesley Collins and Cecil Mouland, and started Brown on a research quest that would extend from her initial survey of the 1914 newspaper coverage, to a study of the inquiry records (the only copies of which were held by the provincial government in the attorney general's law library) and a series of in-depth personal interviews. The *Daily News* piece was followed by a longer article, also called "Death March," which appeared in the national magazine *The Atlantic Advocate* in September

36 See, for example, L.E.F. English, *Outlines of Newfoundland History* (London; Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons, [1929]), 84. "Blind Whiteness" by Michael Harrington aired 15 April 1953. See Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, *Atlantic School Broadcasts 1952–53: Presented by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Affiliated Private Stations for the Provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland* ([s.l., s.n.]), 93.

37 See Alexander Parsons, "Tragedies of the Ice," in *The Book of Newfoundland*, ed. J.R. Smallwood (St John's: Newfoundland Book Publishers, 1937), 2:255–56. I have not been able to locate Brown's *Newfoundland Story Hour* script.

1965.³⁸ A radio play, a stage play, and a television documentary script followed in quick succession.³⁹

Brown would later maintain that, from the moment she had read it, the story “mesmerized me and made a prisoner of me; it would not let me go.”⁴⁰ Two opportunities, in particular, cemented her dedication to it. The first was her contact with the survivors. Two of her primary informants, Cecil Mouland (a teenager at the time of the disaster, now “a grand, sweet man” with an affable manner, with whom Brown built a longstanding friendship) and, later, John J. Howlett (whose anger over the events was still evident a half a century later) told Brown their stories in their own words.⁴¹ Their expressive speech was in sharp contrast to the flat and stilted prose of the inquiry findings, which Brown first read in the spring of 1965 in preparation for the *Atlantic Advocate* story. As Harold Horwood would later note in his foreword to *Death on the Ice*, these documents were alienating in that they rendered the witnesses’ speech into a formal Standard English instead of the Newfoundland dialects the men actually spoke; as well, they were narrowly focused on determining legal questions rather than assessing the human impact of the events. (Significantly, Cecil Mouland, one of the youngest and least experienced sealers on the ice, did not testify at the inquiries.) From her initial interviews for the *Daily News* in 1964, Brown personally interviewed at least nine of the remaining survivors and relations of survivors, and engaged in correspondence with several others, dialogues often sparked by the appearance of Brown’s earlier publications. Despite the many differences between them (sex, class, region of origin, generation), Brown claimed an experiential and spiritual connection with the men she wrote about, often publicly recounting her own experiences of falling through the ice and nearly drowning as a child and describing

38 Cassie Brown, “Death March: The Story of a Sealing Disaster,” *Daily News* (St John’s), 31 March 1964, pp. 11–12, reprinted in *Writing the Sea*, 34–59; and Cassie Brown, “Death March,” *Atlantic Advocate* (September 1965): 51–66.

39 The radio play, “Death March” (file 4.10.003) was written in 1967; a later version entitled “Death on the Ice” was produced by the CBC in 1974. The stage play, “Death on the Ice” (file 4.15.001; date unknown) has been staged in a high-school production. The television documentary was commissioned by the CBC in 1970 but not produced.

40 Brown to Margaret Killian, 21 March 1973, file 9.04.003.

41 Brown to Harold Horwood, 4 December 1971, file 9.03.002; Cassie Brown, Interview with Richard Beaton on the television show *Authors* in 1979, rebroadcast on CBC’s *Radio Noon Crosstalk*, 4 April 2008, http://www.cbc.ca/radionoonnl/interview_archives/2008_apr_w1.html, accessed 21 July 2009.

the act of writing as a mystical process that exacted a physical as well as mental toll: in a radio interview recorded in 1979, for example, she commented, “[When writing *Death on the Ice*] I feel that I did go back in time to a degree. I was there. I walked over the ice with them. I was freezing to death with them. I was hungry with them. I was cold to the marrow of my bones.”⁴²

A second, serendipitous event that made *Death on the Ice* possible was the arrival of a photograph album. In 1967, Brown’s cousin, an antiques dealer, obtained a collection of photographs showing the rescue effort and the corpses of the dead men, taken in the spring of 1914 by an unknown photographer who had been aboard the rescue ship the *Bellaventure*. A great believer in mystical connections, Brown often expressed that it was fate that put these photographs into her hands. In later years, these photographs also served as an enforceable form of her copyright on the story, as she sought acknowledgment of her ownership of the images by any source that used them.⁴³

Brown sent a 95-page manuscript entitled “Death March” to McClelland & Stewart on 26 November 1968. Within weeks, McClelland & Stewart declined it, but encouraged the author to try elsewhere. In February 1969, Brown sent the work, now entitled “Death on the Ice,” to Doubleday Canada, a subsidiary of New York-based Doubleday Inc. There, editor Douglas Gibson saw potential in the manuscript, although it was clear that it needed further work. At 36,000 words (a little over half the usual length of a book), it would have to be expanded and the historical context elaborated for a mainland audience unfamiliar with the natural and social setting. The style also struck Gibson as betraying the text’s roots in journalism: in the current draft, despite the occasional use of dialogue, most of the thoughts and words of the sealers were given in flashforwards paraphrasing their testimony at the inquiries – a feature that may have underscored the historical accuracy of the text, but also decreased the suspense of the unfolding story. These issues aside, the narrative was compelling, and the photographs of the rescue effort that Brown had sent along with the manuscript were arresting historical documents that testified to the story’s veracity and dramatic power.

42 Cassie Brown, Interview with Richard Beaton.

43 In 1973, for example, Brown reprimanded the local CBC for not acknowledging the provenance of the photos in the television program *This Land* (Brown to Jack Kellum, 26 March 1973, file 9.04.001).

Gibson saw his book, but had doubts about his author. Brown was a relative unknown, and this, combined with the regional subject matter, made the potential publication an uncertain commercial proposition. A solution, however, presented itself. Doubleday Canada was already publishing one Newfoundland author, Harold Horwood, an accomplished writer whose background as a politician, union organizer, and political journalist established him in Gibson's eyes as an authority on Newfoundland history and society.⁴⁴ If Horwood could be brought in to finish the manuscript, Gibson had little doubt it would be both well executed and saleable. Gibson approached Horwood about the project, and, on 22 August 1969, the editor's assistant wrote to Brown expressing Doubleday Canada's interest in publishing the book and suggesting, in light of foreseen marketing difficulties, a co-authoring agreement with Harold Horwood. The letter concluded with a request for permission to forward the copy of Brown's manuscript to the other writer.⁴⁵

Brown, however, was not eager to relinquish her manuscript or her authorship of the text. Without accepting or rejecting Gibson's offer, in a letter of 3 September she outlined her credentials as a journalist and author in local and national venues, and requested more details about the creative and financial terms of the proposed arrangement.⁴⁶ On 25 September 1969, Gibson responded to her personally, offering his editorial assessment of the work for the first time. Describing the required revisions, which included the addition of contextual information and further characterization of the main players, Gibson suggested that the thoughts and words of the sealers could "legitimately be fictionalised" with reference to the historical record and rendered into novelistic dialogue along the lines of that of Bruce Catton's popular books on the American Civil War. For Gibson, it was Horwood who had the "really masterly touch – in a style completely different from newspaper writing"⁴⁷ that was necessary to turn the story into an arresting literary work. Anticipating

44 Douglas Gibson, personal communication, 15 June 2009. Horwood had recently published the travel book *Newfoundland* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1969). His next work with Doubleday would be *White Eskimo: A Novel of Labrador* (1972). Horwood discusses his early life in politics and journalism in "Harold Horwood," in *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, no. 15 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1992), 237–53.

45 Jennifer M. Glossop to Brown, 22 August 1969, file 9.03.001.

46 Brown to Glossop, 3 September 1969, file 9.03.001.

47 Douglas Gibson to Brown, 30 October 1969, file 9.03.001.

that “all going well, the bulk of [the] expansion would fall to Harold Horwood’s lot,” Gibson proposed that the eventual royalties be split 50-50 between the authors, whose names would be displayed with equal prominence on the jacket.⁴⁸

Despite Doubleday Canada’s interest in involving Horwood, Brown was convinced that she was the right person to finish the work due to her body of research and the praise her earlier publications had received from the surviving sealers.⁴⁹ While she was not averse to involving Horwood in an editorial capacity at a future stage, it would take a sighting of Farley Mowat in the archives to sufficiently alarm her to the point of agreeing to Horwood’s involvement upfront. Mowat, she learned, was also carrying out research on the seal hunt (for *Wake of the Great Sealers*, McClelland & Stewart, 1973), and “knowing how thorough and terrifyingly competent Farley is,” she later wrote to Gibson, “I phoned Harold and asked if he was still interested in collaborating.”⁵⁰ The decision was a reasonable one: at the time Horwood’s was the only name to rival Mowat’s in Newfoundland literature, and the two men were close friends. Brown knew that association with Horwood would give her project some needed weight in Canadian literary circles.

After receiving editorial suggestions from Gibson and Horwood, Brown worked on the manuscript alone for a year and half, finally handing over a 100,000-word draft to Horwood, who spent two intensive weeks editing it in March 1971. While Horwood rewrote the opening and concluding chapters by making significant cuts to and rearrangements of Brown’s material, in the intervening chapters he made very few substantive changes but carried out extensive line-editing focused on tightening the prose. At the time of submitting the final manuscript, both writers stated their preference for crediting Brown as the sole author. However, in a deliberation and negotiation process not recorded on paper, Horwood was ultimately accorded an “assisting” authorial role,⁵¹ which, in the contract signed 18 November 1971, was recognized with a 10 per cent cut of the author royalties. While the co-authorship arrangement would cause increasing tension between the two writers in the years to come, at the time the writing

48 Gibson to Brown, 25 September 1969, file 9.03.001.

49 Brown to Gibson, 28 September 1969, file 9.03.001.

50 Brown to Gibson, 11 November 1969, file 9.03.001.

51 Douglas Gibson, personal correspondence, 15 June 2009.

and editing process was a surprisingly smooth confluence of differing attitudes, styles, and envisioned audiences.⁵²

By the fall of 1971, Gibson had succeeded in convincing Doubleday Canada's parent company in New York to purchase the American rights of the book and, it appears, to take on some of the responsibility for production. *Death on the Ice* was copy-edited in New York, though Gibson insisted on personally overseeing the finalization of the manuscript in Toronto.⁵³ The finished product would include numerous paratextual elements intended in part to aid readers unfamiliar with the history and geography of the region (elements that would also prove useful when the book began to be used in the classroom): maps of Newfoundland and Labrador, an "Author's Note" by Brown detailing her primary sources, and appendices listing the names of the men and the ships involved. A foreword by Horwood (written, we are told, from "Toronto") stresses the "historical [accuracy]" of the book that "reads like a novel" and acknowledges Brown's authorship; it also, significantly, highlights the juxtaposition in the text of Abram Kean with William Coaker, the founder of the Fishermen's Protective Union and the "workingman's hero of the time," who was on the ice in 1914 as an observer. Horwood's foreword (which also, as I have already noted, draws attention to Brown's reclaiming of the vernacular) offers, in effect, an influential reading of the work's larger political and cultural significance.

The final copy-edited typescript of *Death on the Ice*, dating from the spring of 1972 and with mark-up from Brown, Horwood, and Gibson, is a revealing palimpsest of cultural perspectives. Horwood's criticisms of the contemporary sealing industry, which he had first made public in 1960,⁵⁴ as well as his awareness of non-Newfoundland readers, are apparent in his vigilance in eradicating any euphemistic phrases for the seal hunt, replacing "seal hunt" for "seal fishery" in all cases it occurred. ("Seal fishery" is common parlance in Newfoundland.) Horwood's view on the hunt was clear in his substituting the word "kills" for "harvests" in the overview of Abram Kean's sealing record, as he wrote in an explanatory note to the editor, "Calling the bloody

52 For a more detailed discussion of the Brown/Horwood collaboration, see Nancy Earle, "The Making of *Death on the Ice*," *Newfoundland Quarterly* 102, no. 3 (Winter 2009/2010): 12–15, 29–33.

53 JoAnn Johnson to Brown, 28 July 1972, file 9.03.001.

54 Horwood called for greater environmental scrutiny of the then-unregulated hunt in "Tragedy on the Whelping Ice," *Canadian Audubon* 22, no. 2 (March–April 1960): 37–41.

butchery of the seal hunt a 'harvest' is a bit of double-dealing semantics that I dislike intensely."⁵⁵ It is significant, too, that the one reference to "baby seals" (9) – an anthropomorphic phrase used by anti-sealing advocates that continued to rankle some Newfoundland readers in 2008⁵⁶ – appears in one of the opening chapters written by Horwood.

Perhaps because she envisioned Newfoundlanders with personal connections to the disaster as her primary audience, or perhaps because she reluctant to draw any conclusions that were not supported conclusively by her research, Brown resisted the pull to editorializing that Horwood sometimes exhibited. Among her final changes to the manuscript were to neutralize some of Horwood's phrases that cast judgment on the men involved, especially Abram Kean. Primarily concerned with telling the sealers' story in a factual and empathetic account, Brown was not politicized about the seal hunt as a current events issue; in the period she was finalizing the manuscript, it seemed to her as if its final years were at hand, making the sealing controversy, as far as she was concerned, "a dead issue."⁵⁷ With this in mind, a last-minute change she made to the text is extremely telling about the cultural significations of *Death on the Ice* for Doubleday Canada and for Brown. In the edited typescript, Gibson had added a final paragraph to the concluding chapter that brought the narrative "up to date": "In 1972, fate had some more ironic fun with the seal hunt. In January of that year the Canadian Government formally banned the Canadian seal hunt. The ban was inspired not by any concern for the thousands of men who over the years had lost their lives working on the ice; despite official denials the ban was obviously brought on by a public outcry against killing fluffy white baby seals."⁵⁸ Brown, who had voiced no objection to Horwood's insistence on describing the industry in direct, graphic language, did not want the story to be framed in the terms of the current animal-rights issue, although this was undoubtedly how it would be received by many readers. While the paragraph was axed ("at [Brown's] request"⁵⁹) before the

55 Final typescript, p. 8F, note, file 9.03.004.

56 The phrase was noted by two readers participating in a province-wide book club on *Death on the Ice* on CBC's *Radio Noon Crosstalk*, 4 April 2008, http://www.cbc.ca/radionoonnl/cross_archives/2008_apr_w1.html, accessed 21 July 2009.

57 Brown to Gibson, 28 December 1971, file 9.03.001.

58 Final typescript, p. 181, file 9.03.005.

59 Brown to Cal Holloway, 18 October 1972, file 9.04.003.

first printing, it was included in copies sent to advance reviewers and was quoted at length by Serrell Hillman in the national *Quill & Quire* review.⁶⁰

The Brown/Horwood collaboration may be seen as the final stage in Brown's apprenticeship. While the rightness of the decision to credit Horwood as an author of *Death on the Ice* may be debated, the decision definitely had negative repercussions for Brown's literary reputation in the years to come, as some reviewers and readers credited Horwood with the authorship of the work, and, later still, Horwood himself claimed to have "not only [rewritten] the book, [but] reshaped it and recast it" during his final edit.⁶¹ While Horwood's comments obscure the extent of Brown's artistic control, which, as I argue elsewhere, is most evident in the text's tone and its open-endedness, Horwood's importance as a mentor, stylist, and critically astute reader is not to be undervalued. Few people were as skilled, as knowledgeable about the subject, as sympathetic to its political dimensions, or as well positioned in terms of contemporary Canadian publishing as Horwood to serve as one of Brown's editors, and his responses to her work at all stages of the writing process heightened her confidence and intensified her focus. With no other professional or social connections to her Toronto publisher, in her correspondence to Gibson Brown often reported Horwood's positive comments on her work ("moving," "suspenseful," "important") in order to advocate for the power of her material and, writing to Horwood directly, thanked him for his encouragement of her next project (*A Winter's Tale*), which was already on the horizon as *Death on the Ice* approached publication.⁶²

Into the Hands of Readers: The Marketing and Reception of *Death on the Ice*

On 24 March 1972, Douglas Gibson gave Brown his standard warning to authors: "Don't expect too much in the way of sales": "Please remember that we live in a country where a book that sells 5,000 copies gets on the national best-seller list ... [A]lways remember that a national sale of 3,000 is pretty good. Anything above that is very good.

60 Serrell Hillman, [Review of *Death on the Ice*], *Quill & Quire* 38, no. 11 (November 1972): 11.

61 Horwood, "Harold Horwood," 250.

62 Brown to Horwood, 4 December 1971, file 9.03.002.

So make that your personal goal and you'll avoid disappointment."⁶³ Neither Gibson nor Brown needed to worry: *Death on the Ice* began selling briskly; by the fall of 1973, the hardcover went into its third printing;⁶⁴ the paperback edition, published in the winter of 1974, would put an additional 26,000 copies in print by the following autumn.⁶⁵

In addition to the *Quill & Quire* review already cited, positive reviews appeared in major newspapers across Canada, including the *Globe and Mail*, the *Montreal Star*, and the *Winnipeg Free Press*. While a number of these reviews began with an obligatory condemnation of the seal hunt,⁶⁶ most were sympathetic to the subject matter and overwhelmingly favourable about the book's execution, praising what was seen as Brown's unembellished journalistic style. In addition to being reviewed by virtually every media outlet in Newfoundland, *Death on the Ice* was also featured in the national magazines *Chatelaine*, *Books in Canada*, *Canadian Author & Bookman*, and *The Financial Post*. Along with Cecil Mouland, Brown was interviewed by Peter Gzowski on the influential national CBC radio program *This Country in the Morning* (recorded 6 November 1972), and appeared solo on the national television program *Luncheon Date*, filmed in Toronto in February 1973.

While Gibson reported persistent trouble with sales in Canada's western provinces, where local buyers saw the book as a regional story that would not appeal to public tastes, *Death on the Ice* was well received in the United States. The American edition received positive notices in *Kirkus Reviews* and *Publishers Weekly*, was favourably reviewed in the *Washington Post Book World* in the fall of 1972,⁶⁷ and was picked as one of the "best books for young adults" by the *School Library Journal* in May 1973. The international enthusiasm

63 Gibson to Brown, 24 March 1972, file 9.03.001.

64 David J. Nelson to Brown, 25 October 1973, file 9.03.001.

65 Jonathan Lovat Dickson to Brown, 17 October 1974, file 9.03.001.

66 "When one thinks of the seal-hunt in Canada today, the inhumane butchery of the defenceless harp-seal pups is of course what comes to mind," wrote Roderick McFadyen ("The Seal-Hunting Tragedy of 1914," *Toronto Star*, 3 February 1973, p. 85), while the reviewer in *The Columbian Sunday Magazine* (BC) reflected, "In the rush to weep for the baby seal – and justly so – few have thought to weep for the hundreds of men lost over the years..." (file 9.04.002, clippings).

67 *Kirkus Reviews* (1 September 1972); *Publishers Weekly* (3 November 1972); and David Roberts, "A Chilling Tale of Greed and Doom," *The Washington Post Book World* (17 December 1972), file 9.03.00.

for the book, as demonstrated by the American publication and the international serializations, prompted Gibson to remind his Canadian sales team that the book was not of “local interest only.”⁶⁸

While reviewers recommended *Death on the Ice* as an adventure tale or as a work of Canadian history – its subject matter contributed to the construction of the inhospitable Canadian “North” and the thematic approach to reading Canadian literature currently being popularized by Margaret Atwood’s *Survival*⁶⁹ – the social implications of the story were also apparent and, judging by the personal letters written to Brown after publication, especially important to readers.⁷⁰ The book resonated with Bessie North of Nova Scotia, for example, who wrote, “I have always known men who earnt their living with their hands and your poor victims in their talk and actions ring very true.” Margaret A. Killian of Hollywood, CA, commented, “It may have been written as a truly factual narrative, objectively and dispassionately, *but* upon finishing the book and laying it aside, one looks almost unconsciously for blood and bits of frozen skin upon one’s hands!” Killian continues, “Perhaps the era of this particular industry is gone forever but capital must still depend on labor and if your book teaches anything at all, it is that the lifeline of communication between the two must always exist – that there is a basic and simple brotherhood between all men of life and death.”⁷¹

In Newfoundland, the force of the social critique was underscored by the book’s recovery of the experiences of the common sealers, whose perspectives had rarely been included in the printed record. For novelist Percy Janes, *Death on the Ice* was a reminder that “the real or true history of Newfoundland is now beginning to be written.” Another St John’s reader, recalling her father’s life in the sealing industry, urged, “*every Newfoundlander should read [this] book.*”⁷² The cultural paradigm shift such a work was capable of initiating was apparent to Mary Pratt (Companion of the Order of Canada 1996), the young visual artist who had been living in the province since the 1950s. Conveying her enthusiasm to the author she had never met,

68 Gibson to Brown, 15 February 1973, file 9.03.00.

69 Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).

70 Readers’ letters to Brown are retained in file 9.04.003 of her literary papers.

71 Bessie North to Brown, letter postmarked 5 January 1976; Margaret Killian to Brown, 1 March 1973, p. 2, file 9.04.003.

72 Percy Janes to Brown, 27 February 1973; and Mary B. Whiteley to Brown, 7 January 1973, file 9.04.003.

Pratt's letter to Brown opens: "Congratulations on your really great book! I found myself rushing through it at such a rate that I couldn't wait to finish it; and didn't move from the chair until I had. Well – that's not quite true. But I kept it in my hand as I gave the youngest his bath, and I haven't stopped thinking about it and considering its implications." Struck by the political relevance of the text, the New Brunswick-born Pratt described her own journey as a student of Newfoundland culture and explained that she gained through the book a new perspective on the province's history, a subject she had "always heard [about] from the mercantile point of view – or the clergyman's." Pratt concluded that she was glad the book had been written by a Newfoundlander and surmised that it probably could not have been written by anyone else.⁷³

Pratt's evocation of what I see as an image of the three-handed mother is, I think, a powerful one for critics of Newfoundland culture. (It is interesting that a number of readers' letters refer to "hands," either those of the sealers or the reader's own, suggesting an intriguing linkage between the acts of working and reading.) The image of a woman who is able to carry out her day-to-day duties *while reading a Newfoundland book* flies in the face of the received wisdom that Newfoundlanders have always been too concerned with the business of survival to concern themselves with the fine arts, especially printed literature.⁷⁴ The phenomenal response to *Death on the Ice* in general and Pratt's response to it in particular are strong indications that the tide was changing for perceptions of Newfoundland culture and cultural producers.

In published reviews, *Death on the Ice* also re-opened discussions of Newfoundland's political history and contributed to the ongoing debates surrounding the issue of Newfoundland nationalism, a concept that has remained current in the years following 1949 as an enduring artistic theme, if not an organized political movement. An early local review of *Death on the Ice*, written by St John's-based playwright and critic Michael Cook, serves as one example of this discourse. Comparing the 1914 sealing disaster with the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Great War (both central events in the Canadian mythology) as grist for a nation-building

73 Mary Pratt to Brown, 27 November 1972, file 9.04.003.

74 While Pratt, as a member of a renowned artistic family, may not be regarded as a typical Newfoundland reader, her reported absorption in the book was not an uncommon response.

project, Cook also slyly pokes fun at British Imperialism through his assessment of Abram Kean (a native Newfoundlander, though, as a captain employed by St John's merchants, not one of the "folk"). Cook writes, "God-fearing, and a tee total, [Abram Kean] was a classic example of that hideous, almost perverted Christianity that somehow managed to balance greed, self righteousness, God, and a callous indifference to humanity so characteristic of the Victorian era. Naturally, he was awarded the O.B.E."

For Cook, *Death on the Ice* was a kind of revolutionary text, "the blood and guts of Newfoundland's own heritage."⁷⁵ While in Cook's reading the book may be seen to ignite a spirit of Newfoundland patriotism, for author Helen Fogwill Porter, it sounded a cautionary note on the celebration of a romanticized past: "[T]he next time I hear someone yearn for the good old days when Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders were 'independent,'" she writes, "I'll lend him my copy [of *Death on the Ice*] and let him find out for himself what it was really like."⁷⁶ For many readers, the book invited renewed examinations of the province's citizens' participation in the political, economic, and cultural arenas, both past and present.

The publication of *Death on the Ice* coincided with shifts in the Newfoundland Department of Education brought on by the arrival of a new provincial government and changes in educational philosophies. In the spring of 1972, Progressive Conservative leader Frank Moores, campaigning on a platform that promoted rural development and a re-evaluating of Newfoundland's "traditional" ways of life, ended Liberal Joseph Smallwood's 23-year rule as the first premier of the province.⁷⁷ In May of that year, Brown sent an advance copy of *Death on the Ice* to the new provincial minister of education, and by December the government's curriculum committee was considering

75 Michael Cook, "Sealing Disaster Tale: An Absolute Must!" (clipping), file 9.04.002.

76 Helen [Fogwill] Porter, "The Most Terrible Event in Newfoundland Sealing," *Saturday Night* 88, no. 1 (January 1973): 36. Porter recalls that she was so impressed by *Death on the Ice* that she impulsively sent her review, unsolicited, to the national magazine (personal interview, 5 March 2009).

77 Melvin Baker, "Frank Duff Moores," in *The Canadian Encyclopaedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/>, accessed 21 July 2009. In terms of cultural policy, Moores' efforts were also geared to promoting what was seen as Newfoundland's unique and threatened cultural identity; see Ronald Rompkey, "The Idea of Newfoundland and Arts Policy Since Confederation," *Newfoundland Studies* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 272.

its adoption as a textbook in the province's schools.⁷⁸ The book was subsequently introduced in high-school English classes in the fall of 1974. For Doubleday Canada's educational division (an entity separate from the trade arm⁷⁹), the publication of the school edition was a significant departure from its usual practice of distributing American textbooks in the Canadian market.⁸⁰

While in the late 1960s educators in Newfoundland, alluding to the universality of "human values," were seemingly unconcerned about their schools' reliance on foreign textbooks,⁸¹ by the 1970s they were looking to the English curriculum with an eye to its potential "scope for creative work and for fostering our own publications."⁸² When the "Newfoundlandia" component was introduced into the high-school English program in this period, it was in recognition of the province's distinctive linguistic and cultural heritage as well as the increasing availability of works of local literature. The new component had the dual intent of exposing students to local creative works while at the same time "developing an awareness in and a knowledge of Newfoundland – its language, its people, its life, and its literature."⁸³ *Death on the Ice* was thus the first Newfoundland book to be included in a reading list dominated by American and British works. Significantly, unlike these works, the majority of which were novels and plays, and like other staple texts that have since been taught as "Newfoundlandia," *Death on the Ice* was a non-fiction work of early-twentieth-century adventure.⁸⁴ Not surprisingly, a teaching

78 Brown to John Carter, 15 May 1972, file 9.04.001; Brown to Gibson, 12 December 1972, file 9.03.001.

79 Douglas Gibson, personal communication, 15 June 2009.

80 As Penney Clark has outlined, while the call for Canadianization of textbooks across the country was loud through the 1970s, most textbooks used in Canadian schools continued to originate in the United States; see Penney Clark, "The Rise and Fall of Textbook Publishing in English Canada," in *History of the Book in Canada, Volume Three: 1918–1980*, ed. Carole Gerson and Jacques Michon (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 226–32.

81 D.W.S. Ryan, "Comments on the New Literature Course," *The NTA Journal* (October 1968), 39–40.

82 Stanley Sparkes, "Newfoundlandia in the Classroom," *The NTA Journal* (November 1970), 8.

83 Edward Jones, "English, Canada: English, Newfoundland," *The English Quarterly* 8, nos. 1–2 (Spring–Summer 1975): 87, 88.

84 Other staple texts include Dillon Wallace's *The Lure of the Labrador Wild* (New York; Toronto: F. Revell, [1905]; repr., St John's: Breakwater Books, 1982); and Harold Horwood's *Bartlett: The Great Canadian Explorer* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1977).

package on *Death on the Ice* produced in 1976 elaborates upon the historical context of the disaster and encourages comparisons between the historical and contemporary fisheries and seal hunt. While the study-guide makes some effort to address Brown's text as a literary work – directing attention to the use of dialect, especially – it equally adopts a social studies approach to the book's content, rather than a literary history approach that situates the work in Newfoundland cultural traditions.⁸⁵

The critical reception of *Death on the Ice* as a work of literature, with the exception of the articles I have already cited, has been almost silent. Just as reviewers praised Brown's "just the facts" reporting, so too have critics largely ignored the text as text. An interesting (and perhaps *the*) case in point is Patrick O'Flaherty's *The Rock Observed: Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland* (1979). In this foundational survey of "literary responses to Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders" (ix), O'Flaherty devotes the majority of his pages to pre-twentieth-century promotional, religious, and exploration writing, and just three chapters to twentieth-century authors. While his critical assessment of Brown's "fine book" is limited to this one phrase (185), *Death on the Ice* occupies a prominent, albeit curious, position in his study, whose concluding chapter takes the form of a "note" called "The Case of George Tuff." Quoting the passage from *Death on the Ice* in which Tuff, having meekly or unthinkingly accepted Abram Kean's orders to take the *Newfoundland* men back out on the ice, suddenly realizes both the danger of the situation and the "magnitude of [his] responsibility" (Brown 78), O'Flaherty calls Brown's description of Tuff's breaking down in tears "an episode of great dramatic power" (186). While O'Flaherty gestures to several possible interpretations of this passage, it soon becomes apparent that his purpose in quoting from *Death on the Ice*, and the final point he puts forth in his work, is to suggest that Tuff's tears are the "materials for a living literature," apparently ripe for the taking by a new generation of Newfoundland authors (187). Amazingly, although O'Flaherty has devoted a substantial proportion of his study to non-fiction representations of Newfoundland, here he seems to forget that *Death on the Ice* is not raw "material" but a representation in and of itself.

While O'Flaherty here misses the opportunity to analyze the text in the context of its cultural moment, his prediction of the work's

85 Stanley Sparkes, *'Death on the Ice': Teacher's Manual* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1976).

lasting influence is sound: *Death on the Ice* has been significant for the directions literature has taken in the province. In the 1970s, in the midst of the mounting international anti-sealing campaigns, within Newfoundland and Labrador the book inspired individual works of “counter-protest” folk poetry, both songs and printed poems.⁸⁶ In more recent years, it has also influenced literary authors, including poet Michael Crummey, whose “Newfoundland Sealing Disaster” (1998) may be seen to be a recasting of E.J. Pratt’s “The Ice Floes” (1922) through the lens of Brown’s social critique. Included in several recent anthologies of Canadian literature exploring the theme of Canadian cultural diversity and destined for use in university classrooms, Crummey’s poem is a further indication that sealing continues to function as a kind of shorthand for Newfoundland’s cultural difference.⁸⁷

It is in Wayne Johnston’s *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (1998), however, that the remarkable position of the *Newfoundland* disaster and *Death on the Ice* in the Newfoundland imaginary is fully evident. *Colony* is a fictionalized life of Joseph Smallwood, the Newfoundland writer, broadcaster, publisher, and politician who led Newfoundland into Confederation and ruled as premier from 1949 to 1972. In Johnston’s epic mythologizing of Newfoundland, which surveys and in fact *rewrites* Newfoundland history on multiple levels, Smallwood is placed on the S.S. *Newfoundland* in 1914 in an episode that takes a significant, but seemingly necessary, detour from the biographical and historical record. Johnston’s Smallwood is not a sealer, but a journalist (not unlike George Allan England) who goes to the ice fields in order to write a series of local-interest stories for a St John’s paper. While Johnston’s portrayal, like Brown’s, is sympathetically focused on the working men (this is the event that turns the fictionalized Smallwood to socialism⁸⁸), the author’s primary interest in the disaster is as a crucial text in his historiographic metafiction,⁸⁹ the

86 Lawson, ‘Bloody Decks and a Bumper Crop,’ 33. For examples of the poetry, see pp. 33–69.

87 See Carmine Starnino, ed., *The New Canon: An Anthology of Canadian Poetry* (Montréal: Signal Editions, 2005); and Laura Moss and Cynthia Sugars, eds., *Canadian Literature in English: Texts and Contexts, Volume Two* (Toronto: Pearson Education Canada, 2009).

88 For a discussion of the historical Smallwood’s early career and his activities as a “self-educated socialist” and ardent supporter of William Ford Coaker, see Melvin Baker, “J.R. Smallwood – Labour and Socialist Leader,” *Newfoundland Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 23–28.

89 The term is Linda Hutcheon’s.

retelling of an event that has united Newfoundlanders in a shared sense of heritage. Johnston emphasizes the aftermath of the disaster, when Smallwood arrives upon the grotesque scene of the frozen bodies of the sealers, “the strange statuary of the dead”⁹⁰ made famous by Brown. However, while Brown’s death scenes – following the testimony of witnesses – emphasize the power of family and community connections (she records men leaving their assigned watches to be with others from their home communities, as well as several instances of fathers dying with their arms clasped around their sons), Johnston stresses the men’s collectivity: “Joined in some manner of embrace,” Smallwood observes, “were men who before this journey to the ice had never met” (108). While critics have attacked numerous instances of Johnston’s “inaccurate” use of the historical record in *Colony*, no one has commented on this particular example, perhaps, as I suspect, because the whole episode depends on the intertext of *Death on the Ice* and, through it, succeeds in evoking a sense of “imagined community,” of strangers united, if not on the ice, then in a book.

It is significant that, for Johnston (whose literary beginnings were, like Brown’s a generation earlier, as a journalist for the *Daily News*), the journey onto the ice floes is as much about *writing* as about the disaster itself. In the retelling of the *Newfoundland* episode, *Colony* clearly expresses anxieties about the writer’s connection to Newfoundland culture and identity. Throughout this account, Johnston’s portrayal of the diminutive and ineffectual Smallwood – the “puny, bespectacled spectator” and “mascot layabout” (102) who is forbidden by the rules of the ship to participate in the activity he writes about – becomes a comment on the relationship of the writer to the masculine and starkly primal world of the sealers. Illiterate, Johnston’s sealers tolerate the young newspaperman’s presence with good humour, complacently approving the whitewashed accounts he writes daily of their work, “[a]s if,” Smallwood reflects, “I had described their life exactly as it was. Or, as I eventually realized, as if they believed the point of writing was to render the world in a manner so benign that to read about it would be a pleasant way to pass the time” (102). Against the rawness of their existence, the writer’s work is a curious ornament, if not a superfluous supplement. Having watched the recovery of the bodies from a porthole in the ship, where he is

90 Wayne Johnston, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1998), 107.

locked beneath deck, Smallwood cannot bring himself to write about the real story, the disaster itself. While this may be seen as a reflection on the inadequacy of the character of Smallwood, in my reading it is a key metafictional moment in the text, a commentary on the late-twentieth-century author's relationship to the still-current construct of Newfoundland culture, in which "authentic" artistic production is rooted in oral and social folk traditions, not print. Once again, there is a perceived gulf between the author and George Tuff, between print culture and the world brought alive by *Death on the Ice* – all in all, *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* offers an ironic testament to the significance of its predecessor for the Newfoundland identity.

Returning to Cassie Brown, who herself returned so many times to the story of the *Newfoundland* disaster, it is important to note that she did not see the book *Death on the Ice* as its definitive or final iteration. Not surprisingly given her lifelong interest in reaching a wide popular audience, Brown was extremely enthusiastic about the prospect of a film adaptation of the book and saw a feature-length movie as a fitting final chapter for the story.⁹¹ In 1973, she personally approached at least one Hollywood agent (one with a Newfoundland connection), who found the book "engrossing" but turned away from promoting what would be an expensive, difficult, and "down-beat" film on a unpalatable topic.⁹² While numerous companies in Newfoundland, Canada, and the United States expressed interest in making a movie of *Death on the Ice*, the film options were bought and have expired several times. Some projects, however, have come closer to realization than others. In 1974, the Great Canadian Moving Picture Company of Toronto commissioned American writer Claude Harz to produce a script, which in Brown's eyes turned out to be both historically and culturally inaccurate, focusing, as she put it some years later, on "a drunken, brawling, knife-wielding, womanizing character" as the hero who leads all the men to safety.⁹³ Seven years later, in 1981, Calgary-based Hollywood North Productions Ltd. proposed an "artistic but authentic" adaptation of the book, named Brown as special advisor to the screenplay, and made preparations for filming on location in Newfoundland.⁹⁴ Most recently, film rights

91 Brown to Horwood, 18 July 1971, file 9.03.002.

92 Wilt Melnick to Brown, 20 March 1973, file 9.05.001.

93 Brown to Cheryl Buckman, 1980, file 9.05.001.

94 "Research Started for *Death on the Ice* Film," *Evening Telegram* (St John's), 14 November 1981, p. 3.

were bought by Lynk Productions of Halifax, Nova Scotia,⁹⁵ which planned a feature film based on a screenplay by Newfoundland author Des Walsh. Given the current economic downturn, however, the future of this project is uncertain. If and when a film of *Death on the Ice* is produced, what is certain is that it will put in progress another negotiation of Newfoundland history, culture, and identity – and it will mark the beginning of a new chapter in the reception history of the Newfoundland bestseller *Death on the Ice*.

Conclusion

The enduring cultural significance of *Death on the Ice* for the Newfoundland imaginary may be seen to lie in numerous aspects of the book's production and reception: Cassie Brown's engagement in a research and writing practice that concerned itself with textualizing oral history, thereby memorializing an important event in the province's social history from the perspective of the working men who were directly involved in it; an editorial process informed by an awareness of multiple audiences with diverse cultural knowledges; and the response of a (local) reading public sensitized to the politics of representation. In this discussion I have highlighted the challenges of writing Newfoundland in the period Cassie Brown came to be a book author, including her struggles to navigate the literary marketplace as a woman author and her strategies (including accepting a co-authorship agreement with established author Harold Horwood) to speak from her "peripheral" location outside the cultural centres of publishing. Included in this picture is the slow emergence, and even slower recognition, of Newfoundland's own print culture, which has contributed to readings of *Death on the Ice* that do not explore it as a literary work. Just as early reviewers emphasized the seeming simplicity and "bare facts" reporting style of Brown's writing, critics and literary historians have all but ignored the stylistic choices of her representation of the sealing tragedy. Brown's work appeared at the forefront of an artistic movement that would concern itself with a proudly nativist reappraisal of local culture and heritage, and remains a touchstone for the province's cultural producers. As a publication forged in a cultural interstice and internationally

95 Random House of Canada Limited, *Backlist Rights Catalogue Fall 2006*, <http://www.randomhouse.ca/pdfs/RightsBacklistFo6.pdf>, accessed 21 July 2009.

disseminated, *Death on the Ice* has succeeded in engaging directly with a Newfoundland audience in a conversation the rest of the world is invited to overhear.

SOMMAIRE

Cet article examine la rédaction, la publication et la réception du succès de librairie terre-neuvien *Death on the Ice: The Great Sealing Disaster of 1914* (Toronto et New York : Doubleday, 1972) de Cassie Brown en collaboration avec Harold Horwood. Ouvrage mis au premier plan de la « renaissance » culturelle de Terre-Neuve lors de la controverse internationale entourant la chasse au phoque au Canada, *Death on the Ice* en vint à être perçu, si l'on en croit le critique Shane O'Dea, comme un « incontournable du patrimoine culturel » de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador, un ouvrage qui continue de jouer un rôle clé dans le façonnement de l'histoire et de l'identité de cette province. Tirée d'une communication faite par l'auteur devant le Centre for Newfoundland Studies, cette étude explore la mise en œuvre et la réception de ce livre dans la perspective la plus large en lien avec la culture de l'imprimé tel que perçue à Terre-Neuve au vingtième siècle en mettant l'accent sur les premières années de la carrière d'écrivain de Cassie Brown.