Arctic Ghosts:

Whale Hunting and Haunting in Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Captain of the Pole-Star"

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> [I]n 1881 [Captain Kelley] put his ear to the line and heard the whale that he had struck give a deep, heavy, agonizing groan, like that of a person in pain.
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> --Herbert Lincoln Aldrich, *Arctic Alaska and Siberia or, Eight Months with the Arctic Whalemen* (1889)

> John M'Leod, the harpooner, came aft from the foc'sle-head and reported a strange noise on the starboard bow. "I went forrard and we both heard it, sometimes like a bairn crying and sometimes like a wench in pain. I've been seventeen years to the country and I never heard seal, old or young, make a sound like that."
>
> --Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Captain of the Pole-Star" (1883)

By the time Arthur Conan Doyle sailed there in 1880 on the Scottish whaling ship *Hope*, the population of bowhead whales in the Greenland Sea was irreversibly depleted. The seals hunted in Arctic regions were also declining, and the

industry's end, because of over-hunting, competition from fossil oil, and changing economic conditions, loomed near. By 1897, when Conan Doyle wrote about the voyage in "Life on a Greenland Whaler", those waters were "abandoned" and the Arctic whaling life was "extinct" (16). He revisited the voyage several times in lectures, fiction, non-fiction, and autobiography.[1] In them all, he reflects on the Arctic environment, commercial whaling, and whales themselves, specifically the bowhead, or Greenland right whale (*Balaena mysticetus*). Now carefully studied by marine biologists, their numbers have never recovered.

The diminution of this species and the associated decline of the Arctic whaling industry find expression in the ghostly call of the haunting spirit of Conan Doyle's 1883 short story "The Captain of the Pole-Star", which is the subject of this article. I examine the tale in light of the period's impulses towards animal protection and increasing awareness of human impacts on non-human species and their habitats. Applying an ecoGothic analysis, I show how supernatural fiction can offer insights into environmental history and cultural responses to ecological crisis that were, like some effects of climate change, less readily recognizable at the time than they are now.

The concept of "ecoGothic" arose in the late 2000s as a critical approach to reading environmental concerns in Gothic texts, and Gothic discourse in environmental texts, to which

Tom J. Hillard was amongst the first to draw attention. Andrew Smith and William Hughes, introducing their important 2013 essay collection *EcoGothic*, argue that "nature becomes constituted in the Gothic as a space of crisis which conceptually creates a point of contact with the ecological" (3). In ecoGothic fictions, supernatural codes and revenants, which rarely yield single or fixed meanings, connect with unspoken thoughts and half-recognized feelings about the non-human world, including perhaps the most difficult: our complicity in the systems that damage our world.[2] An ecoGothic approach allows me to read the ghost in "Pole-Star" as a sign of the impulses, in the nineteenth century, towards a change in attitudes to wild creatures that stemmed from growing recognition of the effects of over-hunting within a powerful colonial, industrial, and capitalist system of exploitation.

Some valuable studies examine, from the perspective of present-day understandings of anthropogenic environmental problems, how nineteenth-century writers thought about and represented their ecological awareness.[3] These studies tend to prioritize land-based concerns, and marine environments merit more attention in their own right. Whaling, like coal-mining, was in some ways an extractive industry, of "oceanic oil" (Hoare, quoted in Huggan, 44), but whales, of course, were not rock, and whale oil was not equivalent to fossil oil and coal as an energy source; while it produced clean light, its chief uses included soap and lubrication.[4] Nor did whales benefit

from growing concern for animals at the same rate or in the same way as domestic animals or other wildlife such as birds. Specific contexts surrounding whales and whaling distinguish writings about them, and shape how we approach a nautical text like "The Captain of the Pole-Star".[5]

The most prominent whaling novel is Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851), which has attracted ecocritical readings as well as attention for its representations of sperm whaling practices and natural history.[6] Elizabeth Schultz demonstrates how the text promotes readerly empathy with whales and is inflected by Melville's awareness of the inevitable consequences of continual slaughter. The violence of hunting caused extreme suffering to these intelligent mammals, through physical injury from harpoons and an often-protracted, exhausting struggle. Nineteenth-century whalers were not unaware of whales' capacity to feel pain, and neither was Conan Doyle, but it rarely stopped them. Philip Armstrong argues that *Moby-Dick* exposes tensions that also existed in contemporary whaling literature and anti-cruelty campaigning, between compassion for the animals and participation in economic systems. British and American attitudes to wild animal hunting sat awkwardly with emerging recognition of animal rights and human responsibility for environmental health, and much animal protection legislation mingled concern over species preservation with economic interests. In Conan Doyle's Arctic writings and in other literature about whaling

literature, an impulse to identify with the whales as fellow animals has to share the space with feelings of the exhilaration of the hunt and the desire for profit-making. Gothic modes are particularly useful for negotiating intertwined contradictions such as these.

Conan Doyle's ghost story about a troubled whaling captain, Nicholas Craigie, lured to a frozen death on the ice of the Greenland Sea by the apparent spectre of his lost beloved, is not ostensibly about bowhead whales, or even much about whaling--at least on the surface. Despite the purpose of the *Pole-Star*'s voyage, bowhead whales, or any whales, are notably missing from the narrative, made audible and visible only through the traces of an elusive, icy phantom. Through the phantom, the story codes a nascent awareness of an ecological tragedy gradually becoming recognised by sailors, scientists, and writers. Instead of dwelling as *Moby-Dick* does on whale bodies and their slaughter, "Pole-Star" hints of whales as haunting figures, a ghostly presence in the Greenland waters that used to be their home. Bowhead whales, to redeploy some words about ghosts by Roger Luckhurst, appear in coded form "as *symptoms*, points of rupture that insist their singular tale be retold and their wrongs acknowledged" (542). Spectral reminders of bowhead absence speak as loudly as the animals themselves.

To retell the tale of the bowhead whale and show how a Victorian ghost story can acknowledge the wrongs done to it, I

discuss Conan Doyle's Arctic writings, along with other historical accounts of whaling, the development of animal protection laws, and the history and behaviour, especially vocal communication, of the bowheads themselves. I then read "The Captain of the Pole-Star" against this backdrop, as an ecoGothic story that acknowledges the complicity of whaling in the near-eradication of the animals upon which the industry depended, and reaches towards the almost unthinkable--the recognition of cetaceans as feeling beings, and their legislated protection.

Conan Doyle's *Hope* Voyage and its Afterlives

Conan Doyle joined the *Hope* as ship's surgeon in summer 1880. He kept a regular log during the voyage, and his experiences informed several non-fiction pieces and elements of his fiction well into the twentieth century. In "Life on Greenland Whaler", he described the "other-world feeling of the Arctic regions--a feeling so singular, that if you have once been there the thought of it haunts you all your life" (24). His sense of haunting partly relates to a sense of a lost way of life. In 1892 he remarked on "the palmy days of the whale-fishing" when the Dutch had a whaling station on Jan Meyen island, but "now, alas! the whaling appears to be upon its last legs ... a historical training-school of brave and hardy seamen will soon be a thing of the past" ("Glamour"). This summary reflects the general history of the declining

industry and its communities such as those of Shetland and mainland Scotland.[7]

The purpose of the *Hope*'s voyage was to hunt seals as well as whales, but "whales are the things that pay" (*Dangerous Work* 3 April) and the hunting was not a success. Rewards were "scanty" and his list of "our whole game bag for the season" includes only "2 Greenland whales" (6 August).[8] Yet the sheer value of whale products, increasing at the time due to scarcity, powerfully motivated the industry's continuation.[9] Additionally, for Conan Doyle, hunting such "game" was often an exciting, exhilarating activity: more rewarding than "any other triumph that sport can give" ("Greenland Whaler" 24), while seal-killing "shows what a man is made of" (23). His position reflects the period's cultural discourse about big game hunting, which intertwined masculinity, sport, and imperialism, and prioritized hunts that "showed the sportsman in the most heroic light" by focussing on those animals "that fought most tenaciously to the end" (Ritvo 266), which many whales most certainly did.

It was common for narratives of whaling to romanticize the whaling voyage, but at times Conan Doyle struggled to reconcile the necessity of violence against animals with the *idea* of the Arctic environment as pure and untouched. Reflecting on seal hunting in "Greenland Whaler" he notes that "those glaring crimson pools upon the dazzling white of the ice-fields, under the peaceful silence of a blue Arctic sky,

did seem a horrible intrusion" (21). Shane McCorristine points out that although Conan Doyle was "writing in the context of the decline of the industry ... he still imagined the Arctic as a realm of romance and enchantment" (188). His accounts tap into a persistent construction of the Arctic as an inhuman, timeless space, while exposing its incompatibility with the modern reality of Arctic regions and industries.[9]

Further, some of Conan Doyle's writings show a writer sensitive to whales' suffering. In "The Glamour of the Arctic" he admits that "amid all the excitement ... one's sympathies lie with the poor hunted creature. ... I cannot easily forget the mute expostulation which I read in one [eye] as it dimmed over in death within hand's touch of me". Conflicted feelings like these were shared by other writers; numerous contemporary accounts noticed the violence of hunting, often referring to the "poor whale" and its pain, fright, or exhaustion, even while the same report might cast the hunt as a thrilling chase. One 1881 article in Victorian education magazine *The Practical Teacher* demonstrates the mammalian similarities between humans and whales, followed by a description of whale hunting, and a "frightened whale" finally killed after becoming "weakened from want of air" and "exhausted by fatigue" (Wood 423). Even a much earlier account of "Whale Fishing" in *The Mirror* in 1845 describes an exciting and violent hunt, yet recognises that the whale soon "appeared

greatly exhausted …, exhibiting symptoms of the most agonising pain" (Anon 601).[10]

Examining one particularly thoughtful account of whaling and its consequences for the hunted species' futures by Alexander Starbuck in 1856, Heidi C. Scott detects a line of continuity between a "nascent environmentalism based on whale suffering and diminishing populations" and modern eco-centric environmental protection efforts ("Whale Oil Culture" 6). Progress was clogged, however, with economic emphases that long pertained in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century arguments for whale preservation. Mark Bousquet, writing about Henry Cheever's *The Whale and his Captors* (1850), another early text showing "sustained sympathy for the plight of the whales" (254), observes that its author is caught (like Conan Doyle after him), "between the competing desires of sympathy and economy"; Cheever, Bousquet explains, argues not "that we need to save whales for ecological reasons, but so that the whaling industry can continue to have whales to kill" (264). To understand that whales suffer is not the same as recognizing them as beings with an inherent right to exist or be free from persecution. These recognitions belonged to the twentieth century, and even influential naturalists such as John Muir and, later, Aldo Leopold were at best, remarks Mark J. Barrow Jr., "stumbling towards" concepts of "the intrinsic value of species, a value independent of human needs and concerns" (10).

Multiple attitudes to whales, then, co-existed. On one level, whales were a commercial resource, available for extraction and for transformation into valuable commodities. On another level, they were innocent, feeling animals, suffering emotionally and physically. On yet another, they were legitimate game, whose hunting offered exhilarating sport. Jennifer McDonell points out that contradictions such as "sympathetic interdependence with, and instrumental use of animals by humans" were "in many ways characteristic of Victorian Britain" (n. pag.). Sifting through these contradictions in Conan Doyle's writings shows how dominant whaling narratives of masculinity, sport, and commerce mask but do not quell an impulse towards recognizing human responsibility for whales' decline, and towards asking the ethical questions about animal selfhood raised by admissions of sympathy.

However, since no whales appear in "Pole-Star", the story uses the discourse of neither game hunting nor animal sympathy. Instead, the device of the ghost is used, to negotiate different perspectives and suggest that other relations between humans and non-humans are possible, even or only when they lie beyond our usual realm of comprehension. In their introduction to *Reading Literary Animals,* Karen Edwards, Derek Ryan, and Jane Spencer argue that literature's "imaginative constructions" can populate the "blank or shadowed spaces in our understanding of animals" (n. pag.).

"[T]he space of what is not known," they suggest, "becomes an ever denser and richer place for thinking about life outside, or at least alongside, the human realm". Fiction and non-fiction whaling literature offer different ways of thinking about animals, and reading them together may lead the fullest understandings of late nineteenth-century feelings about whales.

The Cry of the Bowhead Whale

Whaling took place all round the polar seas, but in cetology's contemporary terminology, the bowhead whales I am about to discuss belong to the East Greenland-Svalbard-Barents Sea (ESGB) stock.[11] It has been closely monitored since the 1980s, but data about bowheads in the nineteenth century is limited, reliant on the catch lists of commercial hunters (including losses, and oil tonnage secured), and on sailors' and passengers' logs and journals. Early whale science took place on whaling voyages, which "yielded a lot of information about anatomy [but] told little about the animal in the wild" (Kraus and Mallory 26). Reliability of information is further limited by the visual similarity of the bowhead, *Balaena mysticetus*, to the Northern right whale, *Eubalaena glacialis*. The two species--both baleen whales, plankton filter feeders, valuable for their oil and for the baleen itself--were often confused or conflated.

Estimates of bowhead numbers before and after the whaling industry therefore vary but display a clear broad picture. Bowheads in Arctic seas were easy to catch, and were fished from the sixteenth century until the early twentieth. A 2006 estimate by researchers Robert Allen and Ian Keay put the pre-exploitation EGSB population at 52,500, calculating 120,507 animals killed between 1611 and 1911, leaving about 1000 individuals by the time whaling in the region ceased. Now, the EGSB bowhead population may be as small as 318 individuals and is considered to be at high risk.

By the time Greenland whaling ceased in 1911, the fact of human-caused extinction was undeniable, not least because of well-publicized cases including the mass slaughter of American bison, driven nearly to extinction by the 1890s, and passenger pigeons (the last, captive bird died in 1914). By 1913, in *Our Vanishing Wildlife*, William Temple Hornaday could declare explicitly that commercial hunting endangered its target species: "it is a fixed fact that every wild species of mammal, bird or reptile that is pursued for money-making purposes eventually is wiped out of existence. Even the whales of the sea are no exception" (311). Back in the middle of the century, however, despite the awareness shown by writers like Starbuck and Cheever, to most people the prospect of whales' extinction was all but inconceivable. The decline of commercial whaling was often blamed on factors such as economic depression or competition from alternative products

rather than over-hunting; according to Walter S. Tower's *A History of the American Whale Fishery* (1907), the American industry declined following the financial crisis of 1857 (67). One common explanation for scarcity was migration. "Whales are more scarce, more easily frightened," commented one writer in 1857; "they change their haunts or grounds oftener" (Holmes 268). He does not comment on the unsustainability of the hunting. Conan Doyle, too, believed that although "it is probable that the great slaughter of last century has diminished their number until there are not more than a few hundreds in existence," the bowhead was not going extinct ("Glamour"). Instead, it had learned to avoid the whaling ships by fleeing north, hiding amid defences of polar ice. The idea of the North Pole as lure, drawing the whales to a better, safer place, is a point I return to later in relation to "The Captain of the Pole-Star".

Despite misinformation and the resistance put up by engrained views, by the end of the nineteenth century British attitudes had shifted from a position of widespread indifference to animal exploitation to one of support for animal protection (Ritvo).[12] Wildlife preservation legislation, however, lagged behind the prevailing mood. UK anti-cruelty laws began with the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act in 1821 and were consolidated into the Protection of Animals Act in 1911. These Acts related to domestic and captive animals, and did not protect wildlife from hunting; wild birds fared a little

better through legislation and the efforts of organizations including the RSPB (established 1889). However, "closed times" to protect breeding fish and seals began to be introduced in the 1870s. Fur seals in the North Pacific, nearly exterminated in the name of fashion, gained some protection from the Paris Arbitration of 1893.[13] Later, whales benefitted from legislation such as the Whale Fisheries (Scotland) Act of 1904. Designed to regulate the whaling industry and protect the herring fishing (also in steep decline, and fish-eating whales were erroneously blamed), it forbade killing whales between November and March. In particular it forbade killing, at any time, "herring-hog" whales (minke) or "any whale which is accompanied by a calf" (clause 3.4). These steps reached a significant milestone in 1931, when the International League of Nations agreed worldwide protection for the bowhead in "the first international effort ever undertaken to protect a species of wildlife" (Heide-Jørgensen *et al.* 577). In the UK, the Whaling Industry (Regulation) Act (1934) included protection for right whales, immature whales, and mothers with calves.[14]

It is hard to imagine that many of the people behind these laws didn't have hearts and minds for animal compassion, and that is reflected in transcripts of parliamentary debates in the 1930s, if not in the 1900s ("Discovery" Expedition Committee). On paper, however, legislation recognized the detrimental effects of over-fishing and over-hunting, but

sought to sustain populations for commercial use rather than expressing a desire to protect wild creatures for their own sakes. At best, the two goals had to be balanced. Even the International Whaling Commission, established in 1946, began as a "pro-industrial club, with an attempt to manage the whale 'fisheries' so as to retain adequate stock" (Vlasopolos n.pag.). By the 1980s, however, explicitly ethically-motivated conservation societies such as the Marine Conservation Society (1983) and the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (1987) were established in Britain, and whale populations and behaviour had become major subjects of scientific research.

Overall, this picture shows a gradual trend. 1800s whale fisheries legislation worked to promote the industry and advantage its workers; by the 1900s, the turn was toward increasingly strict regulation, and eventually, by the 1930s, towards total bans. While compassionate motivations are often hard to discern beneath economic interests, nonetheless a movement towards recognizing animals' right to exist was evidently taking place. Conan Doyle's experiences and writings in the 1880s and 90s, therefore, happened at an interesting moment on the cusp of change. It is my case here that a work of fiction in the Gothic mode has the capacity to sound the depth of that change in ways unavailable to legislation or even to Conan Doyle's non-fiction. In particular, the story's use of the ghost and its presentation of Captain Craigie enable it to capture the internal contradictions of

nineteenth-century feelings about whales, and perhaps even to resolve them.

Today, many whale species are carefully studied, and modern cetology can tell us something about habits and behaviours of bowheads observed by nineteenth-century whalers. In particular, the bowhead's song and its behavioural adaptation to the Arctic seas inform the narrative of "The Captain of the Pole-Star". Amid the varied animal and non-animal sounds in the "acoustically dynamic region" of the Arctic, the calls of bowheads stand out (Clark *et al.* 232). A research study in the Fram Strait (between Greenland and Svalbard) between 2010-2014 found that bowhead whales produced "complex songs that change annually"--a complexity equalled amongst the great whales only by the more famous humpback whale (Stafford *et al.* 1). Humpback whales, though also baleen whales, were of no interest to whalers, at least not in the 1880s--Conan Doyle described the humpback as the "good-for-nothing cousin" of the bowhead ("Glamour")--but even the idea of the more familiar bowhead having a voice was a novel one.[15]

In his 1889 account of bowhead whaling in the Western Arctic quoted in my epigraph, Aldrich describes the captains

> telling of hearing a whale "sing". Captain Kelley was the first to discover this singing, but he was laughed at for it. ... But when Captain Kelley took up anchor and set sail, every ship followed him. One whale was caught. Soon

> more singing was heard. The result was the capture of several whales. (32)

Signalling to each other, the whales inadvertently signal to the hunters, becoming trackable by sound as well as sight. But the whalers noticed that other whales also responded to the cry of a harpooned animal. Aldrich reports that "[i]t is believed that when a whale is struck, its cry of pain is heard by every other whale within sight from aloft", and that Captain Kelley had witnessed the way a "whole school [of sperm whales], which was three miles or more off, started for their wounded companion, and circling about it huddled together as if to ask 'what's the matter?'" (34). Whale communication and emotional capacity, then, were recognized by whalers and those who travelled with them and encountered the animals.

Physiologically, bowheads are uniquely adapted to the icy northern seas and by the time of the *Hope*'s voyage, they "had been pushed to the edge of these Arctic wastes by generations of whale hunters" (Smith 3). Aldrich explains the bowheads' song as "a sort of call, or signal, for whales when making a passage through Behring Sea, to notify each other that they are bound north, and perhaps that the Straits are clear of ice" (33). Bowhead song, in other words, points north and towards open seas, the way Conan Doyle imagined them moving in "The Glamour of the Arctic" and signalled in the name of his fictional ship, the *Pole-Star*. The whales cannot abandon open

water, but they will follow the channels, or leads, that open up in the pack ice in the spring and summer, to reach feeding grounds. Bowheads generally live between 55° and 80°N, but have been reported as far north as 82°30′N; in Conan Doyle's story, to which I now turn, we join the *Pole-Star* at a latitude of 82°N and so at the northerly extreme of the bowheads' range.

"The Captain of the Pole-Star"

A few critical discussions of "The Captain of the Pole-Star" exist, but none have positioned the story, or Conan Doyle's Arctic and nautical writings more broadly, in context of environmental concerns and science as I do here. Terry W. Thompson has traced the influences of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and Dana Martin Batory draws connections with Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (1798). Barbara Roden compares the story to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), interpreting the ghost in the context of the texts' tragic romances. The story is also significant, however, in its own late Victorian moment in which the ecological reality of the Greenland Sea--no longer untouched by industrial modernity but corrupted and spoiled by the blood of whales and seals--conflicted with the idea of the Arctic as a pure, timeless space. McCorristine reads "Pole-Star" in terms of Arctic "glamour", which enchants as well as haunts, and sees it as a story combining elements of "masculine power,

Arctic purity, and haunting melody" (189). In my analysis, the eerie sounds and visions arising from a polyvalent Arctic environment in "Pole-Star" refract the conflicted attitudes of Victorian modernity to hunted whales through the personal conflicts with which Captain Craigie grapples.

"The Captain of the Pole-Star" can be read as a story of interiority, dealing with the psychological state of Captain Craigie and the maturing of young narrator Dr Ray, symbolically reflected in the Arctic setting; as Katherine Bowers has argued, in polar Gothic, ice "gives rise to supernatural beings that reflect the self ... allowing subconscious anxieties to come to the surface" (72). An idealized conception of the Arctic as blank, empty space makes it a site for projection of human concerns. However, critics also draw attention to the active effects of its materiality. In his discussion of Arctic exploration, McCorristine suggests the Arctic is best thought of not as stable but as "a mutable, unpredictable and opaque force which shadowed the [exploration] ship, occasionally revealing its presence through the sound of repressed and ghostly voices" (51). McCorristine's spectral, vocal Arctic resists the stable assumptions of conventional forms of knowledge. Benjamin Morgan, too, reads representations of the Arctic as epistemologically unique, and observable data about it as, essentially, agents in knowledge production. He suggests that aesthetic experience of the Arctic is best understood at a

physiological level of feeling and sensation and proposes to take "sensory descriptions of the Arctic at their word, rather than as symptoms of unspoken values" (4). The particular conditions surrounding Arctic narrativizing encourage a literal as well as a figurative reading of spectral encounters, made real by Arctic space. In "Pole-Star", the ghost is demonstrably not a product of Captain Craigie's psyche alone and not solely a human spirit. It is also an environmental response experienced, through sight and sound, by all the crew--even, in the end, that most hard-to-convince of all character types in Victorian supernatural fiction (and recurrent figure in Conan Doyle): the sceptical Scottish doctor.

The story begins with the *Pole-Star*, under Captain Craigie's command, lingering in the high latitudes of the Greenland Sea in search of the elusive whales and in danger of becoming trapped by the pack ice. Mid-September is late in the year for a whaling ship to remain in the Arctic and the crew is impatient to return to Scotland. Although the captain insists "[t]here are fish to the north of us. ... I saw them blowing from the masthead" (3) ("fish" meaning whales in whaling parlance), he has other reasons for lingering. Mourning his lost love and attracted by the idea of death, he interprets the "Bogie" heard and seen by the crew as her ghost, returned to take him with her. His recognition of the spectre becomes a first step towards acknowledgement of

responsibility and through it an understanding of another's suffering.

The ghost manifests at first in mysterious sounds: "after leaving Shetland the men at the wheel used to complain that they heard plaintive cries and screams in the wake of the ship, as if something were following it and were unable to overtake it" (7). Listeners cannot tell if they hear something human, non-human, or even inanimate. The sceptical Dr Ray complains that "[t]his fiction has been kept up during the whole voyage, and on dark nights at the beginning of the seal-fishing it was only with great difficulty that men could be induced to do their spell" (7). He attributes the sounds to "the creaking of the rudder-chains, or the cry of some passing sea-bird" (7), in a rationalizing process paralleling arguments against whale-song described by Aldrich: "One master suggested that it was the copper on the ship, another that it was seals, another that it was the ice, and so on" (33). But although they are engaged in seal-hunting at this point of the voyage, the plausible explanation of seal-song (also used to account for strange sounds by Captain Ahab in *Moby-Dick*) is explicitly dismissed by the experienced crew. As the *Pole-Star*'s harpooner asserts, "I've been seventeen years to the country and I never heard seal, old or young, make a sound like that" (8). Certainly, the bowhead's call is today underd as "distinctly different from sounds produced by other marine

mammals endemic to the sub-arctic and arctic habitats" (Clark *et al.* 224).

The harpooner describes the cry as "sometimes like a bairn crying and sometimes like a wench in pain", and when the dismissive Dr Ray does hear the call, it is

> a cry, sharp and shrill, upon the silent air of the night, beginning, as it seemed to me, at a note such as prima donna never reached, and mounting from that ever higher and higher until it culminated in a long wail of agony, which might have been the last cry of a lost soul. (25-6)

The human comparisons hint that Captain Craigie may be right that his beloved's ghost has been following the ship. Pointing to the cry's resemblance to both "wench" and "bairn", Roden suggests that the fiancée was pregnant or in childbirth when she died, accounting for feeling of guilt on the captain's part (48).

Yet by some accounts whale singing could also be as spooky and plaintive as this. The suggestion of "a wench in pain" and a "wail of agony" resonates with Aldrich's report of Captain Kelley's description of the sound of a wounded whale: "a deep, heavy, agonizing groan, like that of a person in pain". In addition to the emotional resonance that collapses the supposed distance between human and animal, the ghostly

cry resembles those described by Aldrich, and by Stafford *et al.*, in terms of the range and pitch of the bowhead's song. Aldrich writes that "with bowhead-whales the cry is something like the hoo-oo-oo of the hooting owl, although longer drawn out, and more of a humming than a hoot. Beginning on F, the tone may rise to G, A, B, and sometimes to C, before slanting back to F again" (35).

Secondly, Aldrich and Dr Ray both point out the *unusualness* of such qualities of sound at all. Aldrich observes that "singing is almost never heard in the Arctic" (33)--at least by human ears--and Dr Ray describes the "extraordinary silence which prevails in these frozen seas. ... You find your tympanum straining to catch some little murmur, and dwelling eagerly upon every accidental sound within the vessel" (25). He cannot, after that, deny that he has really heard a sound. In particular, he notices its emotional quality: "Grief, unutterable grief, seemed to be expressed in it, and a great longing, and yet through it all there was an occasional wild note of exultation. It shrilled out from close beside me, and yet as I glared into the darkness I could discern nothing" (26). The cry invites interpretation as the grief of the spirit of the dead woman, but its manifestation in the Arctic setting and its resemblance to whale-song suggests other meanings too. Luckhurst, cautioning against generalized or unsituated readings of spectrality, reminds us that "it is worth

recalling that ghosts are held to haunt specific locales" (541). In this sense, the cry asks to be recognized in the context of the Arctic seas to which bowhead whales are particularly adapted. The ghost may have followed the ship from Shetland and manifested during the coastal seal-fishing, but the story's crisis occurs while the ship is out in the gradually-freezing sea, kept there only by the captain's desire to catch whales--and for reunion with his beloved's soul.

In Conan Doyle's story whale-song is never proposed as an explanation for the calls, and the longed-for whales are conspicuous by their absence, drawing attention to the question of where they might be. They are "eerie", in Mark Fisher's terms, a sensation that "clings to certain kinds of physical spaces and landscapes" and can be generated by a "failure of presence", by something that should be there, but isn't (61-2). Seals, too, haunt the story by absence (though the crew does catch at least one seal); Captain Craigie describes the risk of falling through an ice-crack in terms that recall an escaping seal: "a single slip, and down you go through a crack, and only a bubble on the green water to show where it was that you sank" (28). The spectre of extinction attends people, whales, and seals alike.

The absence of animals finds expression in the mysterious cry diffused through the Arctic ice and air. The cry participates in the "central enigma" of the eerie, which is

"the problem of agency ... Is there a deliberative agent here at all?" (Fisher 63). Captain Craigie's belief that the ghost is his beloved's spirit, and Dr Ray's that it arises from the captain's deluded imagination, are challenged by the observations of the crew, while its manifestation through sound, mist, and ice transfers the possibility of agency behind the haunting to the Arctic itself. This unsettling prospect leads to Fisher's other form of eerie, "the failure of absence," in which the Arctic fails to remain a passive and violable region of inert matter, but instead communicates its exploitation and insists listeners hear its complaint.

Recognition of truths about either lost whales or lost fiancées communicated by the ghostly cry is impeded, however, by the positivist worldview of narrator Dr Ray, who stands for "a particular form of western rationality" (McCorristine 189). At first, he is entirely confident in his position:

> Mr. Manson, our second mate, saw a ghost last night--or, at least, says that he did, which of course is the same thing. It is quite refreshing to have some new topic of conversation after the eternal routine of bears and whales which has served us for so many months. (7)

Flippant and condescending, Dr Ray dismisses Mr Manson's report, along with polar bears and whales as tedious subjects,

“eternal” rather than vulnerable or agentic. This quotation, in fact, contains the only instance of the word “whale” in the story (other than one footnote about how to measure them and three references to “fish”, two of which are uttered by the captain). The supposed non-existence of the ghost is thus aligned to the actual non-existence of the whales, in text as in ocean. Dr Ray’s dismissal of the ghost, which arises from the environment, dismisses a relationship between environment and whalers, and shows his inability to grasp other ways of knowing the world. He receives the reports of the ghost as what first mate Mr Milne calls “auld wives’ clavers” (23), attributes the sightings to rational causes, and casts doubts on the crew’s (and captain’s) mental stability. What Mr Manson saw must “have been a young bear erect upon its hind legs. ... In the uncertain light this would bear a resemblance to a human figure, especially to a man whose nerves were already somewhat shaken” (9). Dr Ray, on the other hand, thinks he is above such alarms, rational and duty-bound to “set an example to the men and look cheery and unconcerned” (17). He exhorts the first mate to do the same; it is unmanly to believe “auld wives’ clavers”, which risks damaging crew morale and thus potentially endangering lives.

Captain Craigie, however, is open to the ghost’s existence right from the start. Rather than unequivocally upholding one way of knowing over another, through the differing perspectives of these two central characters the

story asks us to understand that multiple and not necessarily compatible worldviews can exist simultaneously. Captain Craigie himself is a man of contradictions. He is an archetypal whaler with all the qualities of manliness and entrepreneurialism that attend a successful career and who displays no concern with whales beyond their commercial value, but he is also the character with the most inherent capacity for empathy; he recognizes in the spirit "the eyes of love" and calls to it in "a voice of unfathomable tenderness and compassion" (13). The story is capable of carrying these contradictions successfully because ghosts almost never mean only one thing. Because of the ghost, Captain Craigie can be presented both as a cool-headed hunter and an empathetic lover. He embodies some of the conflicting impulses towards whales that I examined in the whaling literature, in which an emerging compassion for wild animals competed with the interests of manly sport and commerce.

Dr Ray admires Captain Craigie for being "as gallant a seaman as ever trod a deck" 5), not unlike Conan Doyle's respect for his own captain, John Gray. Douglas Kerr points out that Conan Doyle's person and writings contributed to "a cult of manliness ... practiced in the Victorian patriarchy and sustained by stories of masculine heroism and adventure in the domains of war, empire, and exploration" (189). The seas between Spitzbergen, Greenland, and Norway formed "proving ground for a new generation of whalers and merchants" (Laist,

151) and in *Memories and Adventures* Conan Doyle reflects that "I went on board the whaler a big, straggling youth, I came off it a powerful, well-grown man" (41). Dr Ray describes Captain Craigie as a classic example of this manly type: "With his tall, well-knit figure, and dark animated face, he seemed a man born to command, and he discussed the situation in a cool sailor-like way which showed that while appreciating the danger he had an eye for every loophole of escape" (18). Cool, courageous, rational leadership a successful voyage to the Arctic and home again. But while the captain has the qualities of skill, courage, and decisiveness a whaling skipper needs, and which the Arctic waters were ideal for testing, remaining so far north puts everyone at risk.

The captain's reason for staying is ostensibly to catch whales: "do you think I can leave the country when there is only one infernal strip of ice between me and my fortune? If it came on to blow from the north to-morrow we could fill the ship and be away before the frost could catch us" (3). The ship, then, is not full; despite the "eternal" talk of whales, they have not caught many--or perhaps not any, keeping in mind that the *Hope* itself in 1880 caught only two Greenland whales and a "scanty" haul of seals. While ranging further north and extending the season had become necessary, it was dangerous; whaling history is marked by catastrophes caused ice or storms (Smith).[16] Dr Ray notes that "[a] captain takes a great responsibility upon himself when he risks his vessel under

such circumstances. No whaler has ever remained in these latitudes till so advanced a period of the year" (1). The captain's courage may have overstepped its limits, and evidently, he is waiting for his beloved (and his death) as well as for whales; both represent his "fortune" and draw him north.

In this way, the crisis aboard the *Pole-Star* is a crisis of Victorian economic imperialism and masculinity as well as being ecological and psychological. The undoing of Captain Craigie undoes more than Dr Ray's epistemological assumptions, it undoes the ideological basis of whaling. For Barsham, Conan Doyle writes this "land of mist and snow ... as one of the territories of fall and guilt where the masculine symbolic order faces its own disappearance and annulment" (46). The symbolic order, manifest, for example, in Dr Ray's lettered rationality and the captain's ability to "handle my sextant and manage my logarithms" (14), is under threat from the anti-rational ambiguity of the ghost and the conflicted feelings of guilt and desire it generates. The ghost's influence over Captain Craigie is profoundly damaging in Dr Ray's eyes: "it is sad to see a gallant seaman and accomplished gentleman reduced to such a pass, and to think that imagination and delusion can cow a mind to which real danger was but the salt of life" (24). Here, danger, masculinity, and mental strength are intertwined, and under threat from a kind of emotional

knowledge Dr Ray cannot reconcile with his habitual preconceptions.

However, Dr Ray's experiences ultimately lead him to understand that not everything true is rationally explicable, that emotional intelligence and sensitivity to the external world can also lead to knowledge and understanding. He admits that "I cannot doubt either Mr Manson's story or that of the mate, now that I have experienced that which I used formerly to scoff at" (25). Yet he hesitates to write down what he has learned, fearing to set himself or any reader such a poor example: "Reading it again in days to come, when I have shaken off all these associations, I should despise myself for having been so weak" (26). If the ghost speaks of the unacknowledged damage caused to animals and environment, to admit its existence would be to admit something is wrong about the *Pole-Star*'s presence in these waters.

That wrongness is reflected in moments of ecological disorder that sprinkle the narrative. Once the ship is trapped by ice, the environment produces unease:

> the thin strip of blue water has disappeared from the southward. Nothing but the great motionless ice fields around us, with their weird hummocks and fantastic pinnacles. There is a deathly silence over their wide expanse which is horrible. No lapping of the waves now, no cries of seagulls or straining of

> sails, but one deep universal silence in which the murmurs of the seamen, and the creak of their boots upon the white shining deck, seem discordant and out of place. (16)

Amid the silent ice, in a passage noting the apparent absence of animal life, human noises are inharmonious in a place where they do not belong. Conan Doyle's descriptions, says Dana Martin Batory, "reveal a man who experienced Nature at its rawest and knew how to use it to create a mood" (40). Dr Ray's discomfited feelings about this "weird", "fantastic", and "horrible" icescape are reflected in the behaviour of an Arctic fox, "a rare animal upon the pack, though common enough upon the land. He did not come near the ship, however, but after surveying us from a distance fled rapidly across the ice. This was curious conduct ... [and] even this little incident produced a bad effect upon the crew" (16). The animal's unexpected appearance and unusual behaviour further suggests the Arctic environment reacting to the *Pole-Star*'s intrusion and hints that the fox, too, feels the effect of the haunting, connecting the ghost with both ice and animals: "'Yon puir beastie kens mair, ay, an' sees mair nor you nor me!' was the comment of one of the leading harpooners" (16).

Finally, both whale-song and ghost-song are signals: while to Dr Ray the cry is "ghastly", to Captain Craigie the ghost is offering him a route--not, like the whales, through a

channel in the ice to safe water, but a passage to the next world. The name of the ship invokes Polaris, the North Star, reliably positioned above the North Pole and used as a navigational aid. Star, whales, and ghost must all be pursued northward. Captain Craigie first glimpses her over the icepack as "flying from me--and gone!" (13). Before leaving the ship for the final time he checks his watch, declares he is "ready," and assures the spirit that he is "[c]oming, lass, coming" (31). Dr Ray, glimpsing the fiancée's portrait in the captain's cabin, muses that "[h]er features have thrown such a glamour over me", aligning this "extraordinary woman" and her "strength of will" (20) with the "Glamour of the Arctic" and the powerful lure of the "norrard" revisited by Conan Doyle so often later. In this sense, the fiancée's ghost arises not just from the captain's mind and the power of her personality--consistent with the Spiritualist notion of strong personalities surviving after death--but from the power of the Arctic itself.

Dr Ray and Captain Craigie converse, one evening, about transmigration of the soul. The captain "sketched out the views of Aristotle and Plato upon the subject in a masterly manner. He seems to have a leaning for metempsychosis and the doctrines of Pythagoras" (21). Implicitly, the fiancée's soul has transmigrated to the Arctic, as unearthly sounds and, later, as mist and flurries of ice-crystals. According to the story's epilogue, Captain Craigie's fiancée was Cornish,

aligning her with Celtic "fey" qualities that Dr Ray also associates with the captain's mood. Since he has failed to find death during war or previous whaling voyages, there is no inherent personal reason why her spirit should emerge so strongly this time. Transmigration ought to mean the soul passes into another organism, but this one, echoing whale-song and cries of pain, and taking forms of water and ice, appears generated by the Arctic environment.

On Dr Ray's first observation of the cry, it "arose from the ice almost directly underneath me" (25). Later, he sees the captain gazing eagerly at "a wreath of mist, ... a dim, nebulous body devoid of shape, sometimes more, sometimes less apparent, as the light fell on it. The moon was dimmed in its brilliancy at the moment by a canopy of thinnest cloud, like the coating of an anemone" (31). The ghost here is an elemental wisp, much like the cloud covering the moon, transgressing divisions between ice, air, and water. "Dim, nebulous" and shapeless it also resembles the shadowy outline of an underwater whale and, later, the captain's body during his sea-burial: "a little flickering patch of white hanging upon the outskirts of eternal darkness" that "faded away, and he was gone" (35).

Elsewhere, the spirit arises from the ice, "a white figure moving across the ice field" (8), and forms out of ice-particles when Captain Craigie's frozen body is discovered (fig. 1):

> little crystals of ice and feathers of snow had drifted on to him as he lay, and sparkled upon his dark seaman's jacket. ... some wandering puff of wind caught these tiny flakes in its vortex, and they whirled up into the air, partially descended again, and then, caught once more in the current, sped rapidly away in the direction of the sea. To my eyes it seemed but a snow-drift, but many of my companions averred that it started up in the shape of a woman, stooped over the corpse and kissed it, and then hurried away across the floe. (34)

Animated by the air, the spirit is formed by the wind, traverses the ice, and heads for the sea, an Arctic phantom generated by and returning to its particular locale.

Dr Ray does not try to explain away the shape glimpsed over the captain's body, but allows both observations--snow-drift and woman-shape--to stand, instead remarking that

> I have learned never to ridicule any man's opinion, however strange it may seem. Sure it is that Captain Nicholas Craigie had met with no painful end, for there was a bright smile upon his blue pinched features, and his hands were still outstretched as though grasping at the strange visitor which had

summoned him away. (34)

Humbled by his experiences, Dr Ray gains a new appreciation for the spiritual world that usually lies beyond human reach, though it comes too late to save Captain Craigie. Although the whaling captain's death suggests punishment by the Arctic world he has plundered, this ending acknowledges a shared fate, or even suggests a reconciliation. "Sparkling" ice-crystals and the captain's "bright" smile make the moment almost beautiful, recalling Arctic purity at the end instead of violence. Dr Ray's horizons of knowing and feeling have been widened, and the captain and the ghost have made their peace. If, in Edwards, Ryan, and Spencer's terms, "imaginative constructions allowed by literature help us to remember that the orthodoxies that govern human and animals relations are the result of history rather than inevitability" and literature "frees us to imagine how those relations might be, could be, different" (n. pag.), then, in this story, the polyvalent device of the ghost makes visible the reality of the bowheads' disappearance and hints that new ways of understanding the non-human are possible, if not yet realizable.

"The Captain of the Pole-Star" was written at a time when attitudes towards wild animals were beginning to change, but the new views competed with older ones that prioritized imperial and economic expansion and valued discourses of

sailing, hunting, and masculinity over those of animal protection and compassion. Conan Doyle's story hovers between representing an idealized Arctic supporting successful commercial endeavour and development of masculine identity, and an Arctic becoming bereft of its wildlife, who make their lament heard through ghostly signals and ask for recognition. The absence of whales from both the water and the text renders them a spectral presence, visible and audible only through the ghostly glimpses and sounds of an Arctic environment that remembers and mourns what it has lost as much as the captain does. The ghost communicates in coded form what the late nineteenth century was starting to acknowledge, that the decline of whaling had anthropogenic causes and that whales themselves were feeling beings with intrinsic rights. Though the bowheads are gone, they continue to haunt Arctic space, and Conan Doyle's story expresses an awareness, not yet ready to be openly spoken, of human responsibility for both the Victorian Arctic's bloody past and its uncertain future.

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NOTES

1. See Stone for an overview of Conan Doyle's polar writings; many are collected in Lellenberg and Stashower.

2. On the ecoGothic, see, e.g. Parker and Poland; Smith and Hughes; Keetley and Sivils; in specifically polar contexts, see Bowers; Lanone.

3. Recent work on nineteenth-century environmental and sustainability issues includes Collett and Murphy, Gold, MacDuffie, Elizabeth Miller, and Oak Taylor.

4. For discussion of whaling commodities, see Scott, *Fuel,* and Vlasopolos.

5. I discuss commercial whaling only in this article. For indigenous whale hunting and knowledge, see e.g. Huntingdon *et al.*

6. See, e.g. King; Scott, "Whale Oil Culture".

7. For histories of Scottish whaling, see Buchan, Smith, and Sutherland.

8. Conan Doyle also lists "2400 young seals" (10 August), which sounds a lot, but was considered poor; in 1866 Captain Charles Yule caught 7000 in six weeks (Smith 92).

9. For discussion of Arctic imaginaries, see Hansson and Norberg, Körber *et al.*, and Stuhl.

10. Whales were biologically established as mammals, but a persistent vernacular understanding of them as belonging to the world of fish, reflected in whalers' use of the word "fish" to mean whales, complicated thinking of them in the same terms as other mammals.

11. The others are the East Canada-West Greenland (ECWG), Bering-Chukchi-Beaufort (BCB), and Okhotsk (OKS) stocks. For a comprehensive account of everything bowhead see George and Thewisson; see also George, Moore, and Thewissen, Gross, and Laist.

12. See Ritvo, chapter 3, for a full discussion.

13. This high profile controversy is discussed in detail by John Miller, and Macallister.

14. All cited UK legislation is available from UK Parliamentary Papers, https://parlipapers-proquest-com, and for a full account of the history of British wildlife preservation, see Evans.

15. See Smith on whalers observing whale calls (64) and on the turn to hunting humpback and blue whales in the early twentieth century (101). Bowhead calls were first recorded in 1982 (Clark *et al.*,224).

16. Although the price of baleen stayed high, other whale products faced competition from petroleum; from the 1870s, extend the season was common and by the 1890s a whaling trip could include planned over-wintering. On the economics of the industry see Stuhl, and Buchan (71-5).

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