

From The Explorer's Daughter

As a small child, Kari Herbert lived, with her family, among the Inughuit people (sometimes called Eskimos) in the harsh environment of the Arctic. In 2002 she revisited the area, staying near Thule, a remote settlement in the snowy wastes of north Greenland. In this passage she writes about her experience of watching a hunt for the narwhal, a toothed whale, and what she thought and felt about it.

Two hours after the last of the hunters had returned and eaten, narwhal were spotted again, this time very close. Within an hour even those of us on shore could with the naked eye see the plumes of spray from the narwhal catching the light in a spectral play of colour. Two large pods* of narwhal circled in the fjord*, often looking as if they were going to merge, but always slowly, methodically passing each other by. Scrambling back up to the lookout I looked across the glittering kingdom in front of me and took a sharp intake of breath. The hunters were dotted all around the fjord. The evening light was turning butter-gold, glinting off man and whale and catching the soft billows of smoke from a lone hunter's pipe. From where we sat at the lookout it looked as though the hunters were close enough to touch the narwhal with their bare hands and yet they never moved. Distances are always deceptive in the Arctic, and I fell to wondering if the narwhal existed at all or were instead mischievous tricks of the shifting light. ...

The narwhal rarely stray from High Arctic waters, escaping only to the slightly more temperate waters towards the Arctic Circle in the dead of winter, but never entering the warmer southern seas. In summer the hunters of Thule are fortunate to witness the annual return of the narwhal to the Inglefield Fjord, on the side of which we now sat.

The narwhal ... is an essential contributor to the survival of the hunters in the High Arctic. The mattak or blubber* of the whale is rich in necessary minerals and vitamins, and in a place where the climate prohibits the growth of vegetables or fruit, this rich source of vitamin C was the one reason that the Eskimos have never suffered from scurvy*. ... For centuries the blubber of the whales was also the only source of light and heat, and the dark rich meat is still a valuable part of the diet for both man and dogs (a single narwhal can feed a team of dogs for an entire month). Its single ivory tusk, which can grow up to six feet in length, was used for harpoon tips and handles for other hunting implements (although the ivory was found to be brittle and not hugely satisfactory as a weapon), for carving protective tupilaks*, and even as a central beam for their small ancient dwellings. Strangely, the tusk seems to have little use for the narwhal itself; they do not use the tusk to break through ice as a breathing hole, nor will they use it to catch or attack prey, but rather the primary use seems to be to disturb the top of the sea bed in order to catch Arctic halibut for which they have a particular predilection*. Often the ends of their tusks are worn down or even broken from such usage.

The women clustered on the knoll of the lookout, binoculars pointing in every direction, each woman focusing on her husband or family member, occasionally spinning round at a

Comment [e1]: Waiting indicates that this event is significant which is foregrounded. We also straight into the action.

Comment [e2]: Excitement of the hunt

Comment [e3]: Short phrases separated by caesuras to increase tension. Definite tone of this is used to increase excitement.

Comment [e4]: More waiting for the narwhal to indicate significance and build tension.

Comment [e5]: Gentle, calm beauty of the narwhal doesn't seem threatening but instead we see the narrator's appreciation of their behavior.

Comment [e6]: Magical and other worldly beauty created with a sense of amazement.

Comment [e7]: Peaceful and intelligent depiction of the narwhal with the soft "ly" sounds. Sympathy as they seem tranquil.

Comment [e8]: Present continuous tense used to indicate the excitement of the Inughuit people.

Comment [e9]: Fantastical and magical as though life in the Arctic is a fairytale.

Comment [e10]: Excitement indicated by physical responses of the narrator.

Comment [e11]: Men appear small and insignificant which makes them appear brave in a heroic struggle against the narwhal and environment.

Comment [e12]: Gentle and also an image that most people can relate to or can imagine – the whole scene is given a beautiful and magical feel

Comment [e13]: Balance of life between people and narwhal indicating their interdependence.

Comment [e14]: Surreal and slow with the sibilance of the soft "o" making the image appear peaceful. It is an idealized image.

Comment [e15]: Perpetuates the excitement and tension in the atmosphere.

Comment [e16]: Mysterious and immeasurable nature of the Arctic indicates the moral dilemma as there are no rules or answers here.

Comment [e17]: Blurring of reality once again makes the Arctic seem tranquil and other worldly.

Comment [e18]: Long paragraph of waiting to increase tension.

Comment [e19]: Aside that uses more complex diction but seems less personal. Subject is foregrounded - more like informative writing

Comment [e20]: Longer sentences to inform us.

Comment [e21]: Migration but in more simple diction so people can understand

Comment [e22]: Appreciation indicates the necessity of the narwhal in everyday life.

Comment [e23]: Back to personal excitement and the hunt.

Comment [e24]: List of all the uses of the narwhal indicate that it is a necessity for life. This indicates the focus on basic survival.

Comment [e25]: Vital for their life: physically to build homes and metaphorically as it supports their society.

Comment [e26]: Difficult environment for the narwhal.

Comment [e27]: Danger of the situation that the men are currently in indicates that accidents are easy and the fragility of life.

small gasp or jump as one of the women saw a hunter near a narwhal. ... Each wife knew her husband instinctively and watched their progress intently; it was crucial to her that her husband catch a narwhal — it was part of their staple diet, and some of the mattak and meat could be sold to other hunters who hadn't been so lucky, bringing in some much-needed extra income. Every hunter was on the water. It was like watching a vast, waterborne game with the hunters spread like a net around the sound.

Comment [e28]: Physical indication of shock, emphasising how important catching a narwhal is for the survival of a family

Comment [e29]: Events separated out by sentences which helps to build the tension and excitement in the hunt again.

The narwhal ... are intelligent creatures, their senses are keen and they talk to one another under the water. Their hearing is particularly developed and they can hear the sound of a paddling kayak from a great distance. That ... was why the hunters had to sit so very still in the water.

Comment [s30]: Many men against the few narwhal inspires sympathy for the narwhal but also creates tension as we wait for the climax when the narwhal is caught.

Comment [s31]: Switches to a short, informative style again to give us information and also give a break in the excited tension while the delay makes us eager to find out whether or not the hunter was successful

Comment [s32]: Personification of the narwhal makes them seem more realistic and so inspires sympathy.

One hunter was almost on top of a pair of narwhal, and they were huge. He gently picked up his harpoon and aimed — in that split second my heart leapt for both hunter and narwhal. I urged the man on in my head; he was so close, and so brave to attempt what he was about to do — he was miles from land in a flimsy kayak, and could easily be capsized and drowned. The hunter had no rifle, only one harpoon with two heads and one bladder. It was a foolhardy exercise and one that could only inspire respect. And yet at the same time my heart also urged the narwhal to dive, to leave, to survive.

Comment [s33]: Contrast in size makes the men small and insignificant once more emphasising their vulnerability and fragility in comparison to the huge whale

Comment [s34]: One opportunity for the hunter to catch indicates the importance of this event.

Comment [s35]: Moral dilemma within the narrator is one that we also share.

Comment [s36]: Narrator is drawn into the hunt as are we.

Comment [s37]: Pauses to increase tension.

Comment [s38]: Our expectations, reflected by her — we would expect a better weapon. The lack thereof indicates the bravery of the men.

Comment [s39]: Triad indicates the narrator's desire for the survival of the narwhal that leaves us with conflicting emotions.

Comment [s40]: Now the moral dilemma is foregrounded which is a change in the focus of the article. It is no longer recounting an event but reflecting on the questions raised by that event.

Comment [s41]: Uncertain tone of voice indicates that she is trying to convince herself as well as us.

Comment [s42]: Showing us both sides that create the moral dilemma she is feeling.

Comment [s43]: This is an image that we have experienced but is contrasted with the truth to make it appear false.

Comment [s44]: Defending the Inughuit people. However, although the writer acknowledges the validity of their reasons for hunting the narwhal, she doesn't state that she accepts them ... leaving the dilemma unresolved at the end of the piece

Comment [s45]: Left with an uncertain ending which allows the reader and narrator to continue to reflect on their emotions towards narwhal hunting.

This dilemma stayed with me the whole time that I was in Greenland. I understand the harshness of life in the Arctic and the needs of the hunters and their families to hunt and live on animals and sea mammals that we demand to be protected because of their beauty. And I know that one cannot afford to be sentimental in the Arctic. 'How can you possibly eat seal?' I have been asked over and over again. True, the images that bombarded us several years ago of men battering seals for their fur hasn't helped the issue of polar hunting, but the Inughuit do not kill seals using this method, nor do they kill for sport. They use every part of the animals they kill, and most of the food in Thule is still brought in by the huntergatherers and fishermen. Imported goods can only ever account for part of the food supply; there is still only one annual supply ship that makes it through the ice to Qaanaaq, and the small twice-weekly plane from West Greenland can only carry a certain amount of goods. Hunting is still an absolute necessity in Thule.

Genre: Autobiographical (informative, entertaining, share other cultures)

Audience: Adult readers

O.P.s:

- Sympathy for narwhal
- Necessity of narwhal hunting (justification)
- Moral dilemma (hunting vs. preservation)
- Evoke a sense of beauty (narwhal and Arctic scenery)
- Excitement of the narwhal hunt