

# Excitement and prey: Captains' wives and the experience of marine animals on US whaling ships in the nineteenth century

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## Abstract

Captains' wives, who travelled with their husbands on US whaling ships in the middle of the nineteenth century, encountered marine animals during their journeys. Marine animals are often forgotten when writing animal histories. However, they are a visible theme in the wives' journals, which are the main source for this article. The author argues that marine animals created a shared experience for the wives, the ship's crew and the officers. It was because of these interspecies encounters that the wives became part of the ship's society. A second argument concerns the contradictory relationship that the captains' wives had with the marine animals: on the one hand, they were merely seen as a resource; on the other, they were sources of wonder. In this study, animal history becomes visible through the eyes of exceptional Victorian women who were facing a new environment at sea.

## Keywords

Animal history, captains' wives, marine animals, maritime history, ship society, whales

What does it feel like when you see something for the first time? You have heard about it, and it might be that you think that it will be not so different to see it for yourself. However, when you are eventually able to see a right whale for the first time, how would you describe it? And what about strange and colourful fish, birds or beautiful dolphins? Captains' wives, who travelled with their husbands on whaling ships in the middle

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of the nineteenth century, could have answered these questions. The sea itself was a new environment for captains' wives, and so was the ship. They wrote daily in their journals, wondering at all the new things they saw and experienced. However, they also wrote about the gory whaling business, where great whales were killed in their thousands every whaling season. In this world, whales had no other reason to exist other than to fill the ships' barrels with oil so that whaling ships could return home and make a good profit.

Did these wives experience different kinds of marine animals as part of the ship's society, with shared attitudes and conceptions? How did (or did) they adjust to the general activities and atmosphere of the ship? Previous studies have shown – and it seems that these claims have been taken for granted ever since – that women had no part in the ship's society and that they could not participate in the everyday activities, or could not understand the way the men worked. The prevailing narrative proposes that these women sat alone in their cabins, often crying and longing to be back home with their families; had nothing else to do than sit, think and watch the ocean through their cabin window; and were utterly alone in their thoughts, not least because they had no possibilities to take part in the society in which they lived.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to this standard narrative, I argue that it was not possible for the wives to undertake this kind of long journey without experiencing things together and adopting the behaviour and ideas of their fellow travellers – that is, the whalers. The women played an active role in the way they adapted to the world of whale-hunting. In this article, I will examine the comments and writing of captains' wives about marine animals, although I focus particularly on their experiences of whales. I argue that marine animals created common experiences and programmes among the ship's crew and officers. Indeed, it was because of these interspecies encounters that the captains' wives became part of the ship's society. My second argument concerns the contradictory relationship that the captains' wives had with the marine animals: on the one hand, these animals were merely seen as a resource; on the other, they were wonders, which the wives admired. Marine animals were used in many ways for the benefit of humans as different kinds of commodities. The women could feel sorrow or pity when an animal which they considered magnificent had to die, but they never questioned the right of humans to use the animals and never sided with the animals against the rest of the ship's society. That it was God's great plan was the leading idea in their thinking about animals.

Animals are a visible theme in the wives' journals; they wrote about them almost daily. Overall, whaling texts are more concerned with natural history than other nautical

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1. Jennifer Schell, *A Bold and Hardy Race of Men: The Lives and Literature of American Whalemen* (Amherst, MA, 2013), 140; Lisa Norling, *Captain Ahab Had a Wife: New England Women and the Whalefishery, 1720–1870* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), 249; Haskell Springer, 'The Captain's Wife at Sea', in Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling, eds., *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World 1700–1920* (Baltimore, 1996), 95; Briton Cooper Busch, *Whaling Will Never Do for Me: The American Whaleman in the Nineteenth Century* (Lexington, KY, 1994), 136, 149–50, 155; Joan Druett, *Petticoat Whalers: Whaling Wives at Sea, 1820–1920* (Auckland, 1991), 33–4, 57, 70.

narratives because they often describe the habits and features of whales. Marine animals are quite often forgotten when writing animal histories.<sup>2</sup> They are not domestic or farm animals; they are not wild beasts that can be seen in zoos; and fishing and hunting is possible only for a few. These animals live in the sea, which is an alien environment for humans. In the marine history of the nineteenth century, there are rare exceptions that touch on animals – for example, the concern that seamen had for their pets.<sup>3</sup> On human relationships with marine wildlife we have virtually no literature at all. This is a remarkable failing, considering that sources created by seamen, captains or explorers consist of numerous texts, pictures and photographs of animals.<sup>4</sup>

It is common to focus on wide populations or groups when studying environmental history. However, it should also be done on the scale of the individual. If a study concerns individuals, they are usually famous and influential men who had a respected position in society, such as artists, explorers or politicians. Every person has a special relationship with the environment that is worth studying. Studies always deal with an individual who does something for, in and to the environment, and also makes decisions about how to react or feel about it. In studies on individuals' relationships to nature, broad generalisations and theories are hard to find. We still need history to see beyond the individual case, but we also need individual cases so as not to make broad generalisations.<sup>5</sup>

The study of maritime women began in the 1990s when, for example, Lisa Norling and Margaret Creighton started investigating how Victorian women coped at home without a husband, and how women also played a small part in shipboard life. Joan Druett has written extensively on the daily life of captains' wives at sea, both in merchant and

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2. The topic is getting more popular, however. In April 2018, there was a Maritime Animals conference held in London, which focused on animals in maritime history. There are also new studies – for example, Otto Latva has written about the giant squid in *The Giant Squid: Imagining and Encountering the Unknown from the 1760s to the 1890s* (Turku, 2019). And Sari Mäenpää's 2020 book chapter discusses pets on board: 'Merimiehet, eläimet ja luonnon romantisointi 1900-luvun alun suomalaisilla purjelaivoilla', in Jaana Kouri, Tuomas Räsänen and Nina Tynkkynen, eds., *Muutoksen tyrskyt ja kotirannan mainingit: Kulttuurisia näkökulmia merentutkimukseen* (Helsinki, 2020), 128–156.
  3. Mäenpää, 'Merimiehet'; Michael Stammers, 'Sailing-Ship Seafarers and Sea Creatures', in Stephen Fisher, ed., *Man and the Maritime Environment* (Liverpool, 1994), 147–8.
  4. Latva, *Giant Squid*, 17, 68; Stammers, 'Sailing-Ship Seafarers', 145, 155–7; Augusta Penniman, *Journal of a Whaling Voyage 1864–1868*, ed. Yvonne Crevier (Eastham, MA, 1989), 21 March 1867; Martha Smith Brewer Brown, *She Went a-Whaling: The Journal of Martha Smith Brewer Brown from Orient, Long Island, New York, around the World on the Whaling Ship Lucy Ann, 1847–1849*, ed. Anne Mackay (New York, 1993), 56 (25 March 1848). Stammers examines English merchant ships' masters and officers' writing about sea animals; they mainly wrote about sharks, flying fish and albatrosses (Stammers, 'Sailing-Ship Seafarers', 146). Merchant ships are different from whaling ships, which were out for much longer and sailed different routes.
  5. Donald Worster, 'Living in Nature: Biography and Environmental History', in Timo Myllyntaus, ed., *Thinking through the Environment: Green Approaches to Global History* (Cambridge, 2011), 28, 30–4; Leena Rossi, 'Oral History and Individual Environmental Experiences', in Myllyntaus, *Thinking through the Environment*, 135.

whaling ships. She has accomplished remarkable work with their journals by reading and listing them, and depicting the many different aspects of life on board.<sup>6</sup> With regard to whaling histories, we have numerous studies about how whaling was conducted, the financial outcomes of the industry, and the conditions and life of the men on whaling ships.<sup>7</sup> However, none of these studies have concentrated on marine animals or whales.

In this article, I attempt to fill this gap. By using seven journals – six of which are published and one unpublished – as the principal source material, I have investigated how these individuals experienced a new environment. I have studied these journals through close reading and categorising the topics that are most visible in the texts. These topics, which are elaborated on in the coming pages, were discussed by all seven women. However, these women were quite diverse in character and had various interests and ways of writing. They saw the world through their own situation on the ship. The reasons for keeping a journal varied: for some, it was their way of passing the time, while others just wanted to remember the things they saw. Sometimes, it was their way of recalling events for the family they had left behind.<sup>8</sup> It was common in the nineteenth century to keep journals when travelling, and it is likely that these captains' wives had themselves read travel journals and copied this formula.<sup>9</sup>

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6. Norling, 2000; Norling Lisa, "The Sentimentalization of American Seafaring: The case of New England Whalefishery, 1790-1870" in *Jack tar in History. Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour* eds. Howell Colin & Twomey Richard (Acadiensis Press, Fredericton, New Brunswick 1991), pp. 164–178; Norling Lisa, "Ahab's Wife. Women and the American Whaling Industry, 1820-1870" in *Iron Men, Wooden Women. Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* eds. Creighton Margaret S. & Norling Lisa (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1996), pp. 70–91; Creighton Margaret S., "Davy Jones' Locker Room. Gender and the American Whaleman, 1830-1870 in *Iron Men, Wooden Women. Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* eds. Creighton Margaret S. & Norling Lisa (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London 1996), pp.118–137; Creighton Margaret S., "American Mariners and the Rites of Manhood, 1830–1870" in *Jack Tar in History. Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour* eds. Howell Colin & Twomey Richard J. (Acadiensis Press, Fredericton, New Brunswick 1991), pp.143–163; Druett, 1991; Druett Lisa, *Hen Frigates. Wives of Merchant Captains Under Sail* (Touchstone, New York 1998).
  7. For example, Busch, *Whaling*; Lance E. Davis, Robert E. Gallman and Karin Gleiter, *In Pursuit of Leviathan: Technology, Institutions, Productivity, and Profits in American Whaling, 1816–1906* (Chicago, 1997); and Eric J Dolin, *Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America* (New York, 2007).
  8. Springer, 'Captain's Wife', 94.
  9. Onno Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (Toronto, 2016), 148, 151; Tim Youngs, 'Introduction: Filling the Blank Spaces', in Tim Youngs, ed., *Travel Writing in the Nineteenth Century: Filling the Blank Spaces* (London, 2006), 9–10; Susan L. Roberson, *Antebellum American Women Writers and the Road: American Mobilities* (New York, 2011), 4, 9, 17; Susanna Lahtinen and Ritva Larva, 'Matkapäiväkirjaa aistien – Maria Graham 1820-luvun Brasiliassa ja Marta Keravuori 1950-luvun Japanissa', in *Päiväkirjojen jäljillä: Historiantutkimus ja omasta elämästä kirjoittaminen* eds. Leskelä-Kärki Maarit, Sjö Karoliina and Lalu Liisa (Tampere, 2020), 240–1, 243, 245–6.

The first of the women whose journals are examined in this article went to sea in 1846 and the last in the 1870s. The journals cover their first sea journey, with Mary Brewster being the exception, as she also wrote about her second journey. The wives came from the same area – the east coast of the USA – and the same cultural background. Some came from farms, some were schoolmistresses, and others were the daughters of doctors or whaling shipowners. Most of these women were in their twenties, but a few were over 30.<sup>10</sup> They were religious and pious but, at the same time, broke the moral codes of society by going to sea with their husbands. These women were loyal to their husbands and the perfect embodiment of puritan wives and mothers.<sup>11</sup> They had been to school and knew how to write well. Wives felt that it was their Victorian duty to write about how they had spent their time.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that the ideal was different to the reality.

A sea journey can be divided into different periods, and the themes in this article follow that timeline. First, I describe the situation around these women going to sea and, as time passes on their journey, I describe them noticing that the sea was full of life. Furthermore, I briefly analyse how nature was proof of God's power and why it was so important to describe the animals very accurately in the captains' wives' texts. Finally, I focus specifically on whales. I want to show how the whale had an immense impact on everyone on board ship.

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10. Mary Brewster, 23, was one of the first sailing wives when she sailed with her husband William on the whaling ship *Tiger* in 1845 (Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 14). Martha Brown, 27, left her child at home when she sailed on the whaling ship *Lucy Ann* during the years 1847–1849; she delivered a baby boy during the voyage (Donald H. Boerum, 'Introduction', in Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 13, 16–18). Mary Lawrence, 29, took her five-year-old daughter with her when she started her journey on the *Addison* in 1856; Stanton Garner, 'Foreword', in Stanton Garner, ed., *The Captain's Best Mate: The Journal of Mary Chipman Lawrence on the Whaler Addison, 1856–1860*, by Mary Chipman Lawrence (Hanover, CT, 1966), xvii–xxi. Eliza Williams, 32, left her two children at home when she sailed in 1858 on the whaling ship *Florida*; she delivered a baby boy and a baby girl during the voyage; Harold Williams, 'Introduction', in Harold Williams, ed., *One Whaling Family* (Boston, 1964), 390–1. Augusta Penniman, 26, sailed with her son Eugene and husband Edward during the years 1864–1868 on the whaling ship *Minerva*; Dorinda Partsch, 'Foreword', in Dorinda Partsch, ed., *Augusta Penniman: Journal of a Whaling Voyage 1864–1868* (Eastham, MA, 1989). Lucy Ann Crapo, 33, sailed on the bark *Louisa* in 1866–1868 and her journal ends when she delivers a baby (Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 48, 196). Annie Holmes Ricketson, 30, began her journey on the ship *A. R. Tucker* in 1871; she also delivered a baby girl in the Azores, but the baby died after few days; Annie Holmes Ricketson, *Mrs. Ricketson's Whaling Journal*, ed. Philip F. Purrington (New Bedford, MA, 1958), foreword, 20–1 (29 August–1 September 1871).
  11. Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 18, 19, 26, 34, 40, 82, 107, 143; Lisa Norling, 'Ahab's Wife: Women and the American Whaling Industry, 1820–1870', in Creighton and Norling, *Iron Men*, 89; Laurel Seaborn, 'Gamming Chairs and Gimballed Beds: Seafaring Women On Board Nineteenth-Century Ships', *Journal of Maritime Archaeology*, 12, No. 1 (2017), 71–2.
  12. Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 3–4; Boerum, 'Introduction', 18; Stanton, 'Foreword', viii.

## Women at sea and deep-sea whaling

The whaling industry started the industrial era on the USA's East Coast and profits from whaling were a solid basis on which to build new business. From the 1820s onwards, US whaling experienced four decades of growth. The number of whaling ships and whaling men increased, as did the size of the ships. More grounds were hunted and more towns sent out whaling vessels. Whaling produced industrial material that had to be refined into commercial products. Whale bones were used for corsets and umbrellas, and whale oil played a great part in lighting the new, growing cities. Markets for lubricants and illuminants grew as industry and transportation increased. After the 1850s, when most of the wives concerned in this article went to sea, the whaling industry started to decline and the world moved slowly on to steam, gas and electricity.<sup>13</sup>

During the nineteenth century, the aggressive competitiveness of new capitalism was compared to the masculine world outside the home. Hunting as a sport developed hand in hand with the development of the industrial world; at the same time, more traditional ways of hunting for food were fading away. Hunting was also associated with the expansion of western culture to the rest of the world. The basic law of nature was that humans could use violence towards other species.<sup>14</sup> In whaling, we can see similarities with buffalo hunting in the USA, where tens of millions of buffalo were slaughtered.<sup>15</sup> There are also many similarities with elephant hunting. Hunting an elephant required physical endurance, intellectual engagement, high personal risk and expertise with unconventional weaponry.<sup>16</sup> This sounds much the same as the skills needed by the whale hunters.

Moreover, life at sea changed during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The sea became a heroic and romantic place, and the open ocean was admired in US culture. Steam liners carried travellers and emigrants, and at the same time the working conditions on vessels were improving. Churches set up missionary stations on islands like Hawaii to help sailors. Nonetheless, the traditional assumptions were that life at sea was uncomfortable and not suitable for common people, let alone women.<sup>17</sup> The sea was also a target for

13. Davis et al., *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 4–5, 29, 38, 41, 349, 367–8.

14. I. G. Simmons, *Global Environmental History 10,000 BC to AD 2000* (Edinburgh, 2008), 128–9; Diana Donald, 'Pangs Watched in Perpetuity: Sir Edwin Landseer's Pictures of Dying Deer and the Ethos of Victorian Sportsmanship', in Animal Studies Group, *Killing Animals* (Urbana, IL, 2006), 51; Tara Kathleen Kelly, *The Hunter Elite: Manly Sport, Hunting Narratives, and American Conservation, 1880–1925* (Lawrence, KS, 2018), 1–14.

15. Linda Kalof, *Looking at Animals in Human History* (London, 2007), 147; John Miller, *Empire and the Animal Body: Violence, Identity and Ecology in Victorian Adventure Fiction* (London, 2012), 9–10.

16. Nigel Rothfels, 'Killing Elephants: Pathos and Prestige in the Nineteenth Century', in Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay, eds., *Victorian Animal Dreams: Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Farnham, 2007), 54–5.

17. Anca Vlasopolos, 'Whales and Albatrosses in Nineteenth Century Markets', in Denenholz Morse and Danahay, *Victorian Animal Dreams*, 173–4; Davis et al., *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 16; Helen M. Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean: The Discovery and Exploration of the Deep Sea* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 178–9.

scientific research in two different ways: hydrographers studied its depths and naturalists its inhabitants.<sup>18</sup> Whalers who pursued their prey beyond known routes obtained a leading role in ocean science. They had to observe the winds and currents, and also their prey, closely, and yet navigate in unknown and icy waters. Mary Brewster wrote about how their journey had been more concerned with exploration than whaling: ‘wonder if government would give us half pay’, she ended her day’s text.<sup>19</sup> Voyages could now last four or more years, and the whalers had a large crew – more than 30 men – because they were needed during the hunt. The routes to whaling grounds were either around the Cape of Good Hope or around Cape Horn. Each of the whaling grounds had its own season because the whales migrated from place to place.<sup>20</sup>

It is not surprising that captains’ wives called the ship home in their writings. Home was a central institution to Americans from the 1820s onward, and there was considerable variation in what one could call home. It was women’s duty to create a home wherever they went. By doing so, they, at the same time, secured the moral well-being of their families. However, these divisions into separate spheres like public and private, work and home, according to one’s sex, do not tell the whole truth about how Victorian people actually lived. Women like the captains’ wives could afford books and magazines, and they had enough leisure time to be active outside their homes in the church, politics or voluntary societies.<sup>21</sup>

Nuclear households were the dominant household structure in American communities throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. On the whaling ships, the wives and children lived at the rear of the ship in the captain’s cabin or cabins, and made a small private home there. It was often dark, damp and shared with cockroaches. Whaling ships were not as glamorous as the large, fast merchant vessels, but the wives could still decorate and make the cabins comfortable for their families. When they were up on deck, they had no business to go where the men worked but could only venture

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18. Latva, *Giant Squid*, 31, 41, 189; Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean*, 33–5, 39–40, 43. Whalers kept detailed records of where and when they saw and caught whales. Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean*, 41; Davis et al., *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 261–2.
  19. Mary Brewster, *‘She Was a Sister Sailor’: The Whaling Journals of Mary Brewster, 1845–1851*, ed. Joan Druett (Stonington, CT, 1992), 381 (27 June 1849).
  20. Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 23, 38, 81; Joan Druett, ‘Preface and Chapter Introductions’, in Brewster, *‘Sister Sailor’*, 18; Davis et al., *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 11, 16.
  21. Susan E. Klepp, *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility and Family Limitation in America, 1760–1820* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009), 265, 276; Amy G. Richter, *At Home in Nineteenth-Century America: A Documentary History* (New York, 2015), 1–2, 4, 11, 21, 132; Eleanor Gordon and Gwyneth Nair, *Public Lives: Women, Family and Society in Victorian Britain* (New Haven, CT, 2003), 1, 3, 27–30, 33, 73; Brewster, *‘Sister Sailor’*, 85, 169; Mary Chipman Lawrence, *The Captain’s Best Mate: The Journal of Mary Chipman Lawrence on the Whaler Addison, 1856–1860*, ed. Stanton Garner (Hanover, CT, 1966), 97 (17 June 1858), 153 (2 March 1859); Seaborn, ‘Gamming Chairs’, 75.

onto the stern. When the weather was bad, they stayed down below in their own quarters.<sup>22</sup> This limited the wives' experiences because they spent most of their time in the company of the captain and his mates. They also had dealings with the steward and cabin boy, and occasionally with the cook. Otherwise, the crew lived their own lives and the wives only normally had any connection with the crew when one of them was hurt, killed or caused a fight.<sup>23</sup> The ship's society was hierarchical, and the captain had absolute power. A wife's presence brought much needed comfort to captains, who often were lonely figures. They were even more so on the whaling ships, where the pressure of catching whales created tension and underlined the captain's skills.<sup>24</sup>

### Exotic marine animals: excitement and a resource

The wives' writings about marine animals can be divided into three different themes: they described the appearance and behaviour of these animals, in what way they were used as a resource and what kind of shared activities they created on the ship.<sup>25</sup> After a few weeks at sea, the wives started writing about all the living things they saw and experienced in their new environment. Exotic and queer-looking animals gave rise to many feelings on the ship, where every day often seemed the same. Eliza Williams wrote a note, typical for her, after one and a half years on a ship, about the animals they had seen that day: 'Have seen plenty of Porpoises, sun fish and Birds about today. The Men caught a very large tiger Shark this afternoon'.<sup>26</sup>

22. Tamara K. Hareven and Maris A. Vinovskis, 'Introduction', in Tamara K. Hareven and Maris A. Vinovskis, eds., *Family and Population in 19th Century America* (Princeton, NJ, 1978), 14–15; Druett, *She was*, 7–8; Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 35; Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 45 (2 and 3 March 1846); Davis et al., *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 47; Seaborn, 'Gamming Chairs', 75–6.
23. Emilia Syväsalmi, "'Meidän on otettava vastaan hyvät ja huonot asiat': Kapteenin vaimo osana laivayhteisöä 1800-luvun amerikkalaisilla valaanpyyntialuksilla" *Lähde*, 15 (2018), 60–86.
24. Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 24, 27, 38; Springer, 'Captain's Wife', 95; Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 77 (2 May 1846); Davis et al., *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 16.
25. Druett, *She was*, 31; Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 33 (24 January 1846), 348 (21 October 1848); Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 5 (21 December 1856), 13 (12 February 1857). Lawrence's journal is also available in its original format. See Mary Chipman Lawrence (1856), 'Journal of a Whaling Voyage of Ship Addison of New Bedford. Mass. Written by Mrs. Samuel Lawrence (The Captain's best 'Mate')', Providence Public Library, <https://archive.org/details/logbookofaddison01addi/mode/1up> (accessed 18 January 2021); Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 34 (28 October 1847), 48 (17 January 1848). This was also the case in merchant sailing ships – for example, Dorothea Balano writes in 1910 about a flying fish and dolphins. See Dorothea Balano, *The Log of the Sipper's Wife*, ed. James W. Balano (Camden, ME, 1979), 6 (7 July 1910), 8 (10 July 1910), 68 (26 November 1911).
26. Eliza Azelia Williams, 'The Voyage of the Florida, 1858–1861', in H. Williams, *One Whaling Family*, 107 (22 January 1860). The misspellings in the quotations are as the wives wrote them.



The captains' wives could see marine animals in their natural habitat. They could not affect the way the animals were moving or what they were doing, but they could observe. For these women, to observe nature was tied to mental improvement, moral actions and domestic duty.<sup>27</sup> At sea, captains' wives did not have domestic responsibilities to the same degree as at home, and they had more time to make observations.<sup>28</sup> When reading the references to marine animals in such large numbers in their journals – they all feature such lines almost daily – it becomes obvious that these women spent much of their time observing the animals they saw; as Martha Brown wrote: 'I find there is much to interest an inquiring mind on the Ocean'.<sup>29</sup> They also tried to capture the new scenery in the pages of their journals. To accomplish this, they needed to venture out from their cabin many times a day.<sup>30</sup>

At least until the 1860s, the primary mission of natural history was to collect and describe flora and fauna. In popular natural history periodicals, the Victorian reader found descriptions of animals, birds and fish, and also a record of natural events during the seasons of the year.<sup>31</sup> Mary Brewster gave a detailed account about flying fish: 'This was a small but perfect fish in shape resembling our mackarels ...' – she continued with her description over many more sentences.<sup>32</sup> It is quite clear that Brewster was trying to be part of this natural history tradition when describing the fish so accurately. At sea, the captains' wives could see the power of God in the waves or in the glorious sunsets.<sup>33</sup> The shared thinking was that they saw God's work in every living thing, and nature showed the goodness of God in every way. This is why nature was worth studying. Brewster summed it up nicely: 'Truely God's power and goodness is made manifest to his creatures on the sea as well as on the land'.<sup>34</sup> The publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 by Charles Darwin gradually ended the connection between science and faith, where thoughts about evolution emerged slowly and selectively into the thinking of scientists. Darwin's ideas did not change everything for the educated Victorian population – for the majority, humans were no animals.<sup>35</sup>

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27. Tina Gianquitto, *Good Observers of Nature: American Women and the Scientific Study of the Natural World, 1820–1885* (Athens, GA, 2007), 2–3.

28. Gianquitto, *Good Observers*, 20; Busch, *Whaling*, 156.

29. Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 37 (25 November 1847).

30. Druett, *She was*, 38–9, 353; Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 44 (20 December 1847); Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 14 (6 December 1845), 24 (30 December 1845); Lucy Ann Crapo, 'Journal from a Whaling Voyage 1865–1868', 3 February 1867, Logbook and Journal Collection, New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, MA, USA. The journal covers from 1 January 1866 to 16 August 1867.

31. Leila Koivunen, *Visualizing Africa in Nineteenth-Century British Travel Accounts* (New York, 2009), 86–7, 177; Carl Berger, *Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto, 1983), xi.

32. Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 16 (10 December 1845).

33. Crapo, 'Journal', 18 July 1866, 4 November 1866; Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 34 (28 October 1847), 44–5 (20 December 1847).

34. Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 44 (1 March 1846).

35. Berger, *Science*, 53, 54–5, 75; Gianquitto, *Good Observers*, 116; Harriet Ritvo, *Noble Cows and Hybrid Zebras* (Charlottesville, NC, 2010), 6; Stammers, 'Sailing-Ship Seafarers', 145.

The first experiences of marine animals were always important to the wives; however, they wrote about these encounters throughout the whole journey.<sup>36</sup> Mary Brown wrote about an albatross she saw for the first time and continued that she hoped they would soon have one on deck because 'I have quite a desire to examin one close by'.<sup>37</sup> Natural history offered an opportunity to spend time in a useful way and, at the same time, it was an industrial way of thinking, through collecting or obtaining more facts.<sup>38</sup> Annie Ricketson had never seen a shark and was disappointed when the shark that a mate had killed got loose: 'I felt sorry for I should liked to seen it as I never had seen one'.<sup>39</sup> And Eliza Williams was disappointed that she did not see the fish called 'Jumpers' better so that she could have seen what they looked like.<sup>40</sup> When there was little else to look at, different kinds of birds, fish and also mammals were something to marvel at and write about.

Birds have long held a special place in women's appreciation of the natural world, and this is evident when reading the writings of the captains' wives.<sup>41</sup> Martha Brown wrote: 'Birds are very plenty, a viriaty of sizes from a large Albatross down to mother carys chickens'.<sup>42</sup> It is likely that the captains' wives had read the works of women writers who encouraged their female audiences to be good observers of nature.<sup>43</sup> However, the captains' wives seldom mention biology or science as being the reason why they write about animals. Nevertheless, there is an attitude to be found in their texts which indicates that they were interested in nature in many ways. Eliza Williams, for example, wrote about the whale's food: 'It seems that Nature has adapted a particular kind of food for each specie of whale'.<sup>44</sup> Writing about nature with a capital 'N' indicates that Williams used the word 'Nature' in her sentence as being synonymous with God.

Beautiful fish or birds were nice to look at, but almost every animal also had another role – as a resource. There were many stories and even myths linked to different animals. These stories were told in common discussion between the mates and the captain and his wife. Seamen did not eat shark meat because it was considered akin to cannibalism; albatrosses were sacred birds and it was not approved to harm them. Nonetheless, there were also differences between ships and the behaviour that humans displayed towards animals. Not all whale men were superstitious about the albatross, and some indeed did eat albatross meat. Mary Lawrence also wrote about how they had killed an albatross, and she was trying to save the feathers 'as they

36. Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 378 (24 June 1849); Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 4–5 (8 and 21 December 1856), 235 (27 May 1860); Williams, 'The Voyage', 51 (29 April 1859).

37. Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 42 (6 December 1847).

38. Berger, *Science*, 32, 45, 48–9, 77.

39. Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 16 (26 July 1871).

40. Williams, 'The Voyage', 19 (31 October 1858).

41. Gianquitto, *Good Observers*, 136–7; Druett, *She was*, 31; Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 25 (5 January 1846), 30–1 (19 January 1846).

42. Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 43 (11 December 1847).

43. Gianquitto, *Good Observers*, 13.

44. Williams, 'The Voyage', 20 (8 November 1858).

are very soft and nice'.<sup>45</sup> Eliza Williams knew that seamen used the skin of the tiger shark as sandpaper because it was very rough.<sup>46</sup> And Mary Brewster wrote: 'was soon called to see a shark which they had caught ... The liver is much used by seamen for oiling boots'.<sup>47</sup> Animals were used as a resource in many different ways at sea, and it seems that need was more important than the myths.

On the ships that were sailing for many months without the possibility of getting new supplies, everything that they caught was an opportunity for fresh food. Different kinds of fish were considered primarily as food – an opportunity to get something fresh and tasty to eat.<sup>48</sup> When something was seen from the ship, it almost always meant that the crew, the mates or the wives themselves tried to catch it.<sup>49</sup> After one month at sea, Annie Ricketson wrote: 'Catched some very nice fish with hook and line called the dolphin. They tasted very nice when cooked. They did look about as pretty as any thing I ever saw'.<sup>50</sup> Mary Brewster wrote after two months at sea: 'Great excitement on board during the forenoon. Some one raised a sunfish'. She continues by recounting how the fish looked and tasted when it was later cooked for supper. It was normal that the wives wanted to see new fish or taste them, but they also had their own opinions; Mary Brewster ended her writing about sunfish: 'Had I never seen the fish perhaps it would have tasted better, but seeing it was sufficient to produce contrary feelings'.<sup>51</sup> Without the example set by the captain and his mates, it is very possible that captains' wives never would have tasted all these new things, but not all the wives liked the new things they tasted.<sup>52</sup> On the following day, Brewster wrote: 'Had porpoise for breakfast. The liver tastes very much like beefs'.<sup>53</sup>

This natural transformation from animal to food emerges from the journals very vividly and in great detail. Mary Brewster wrote in October 1847 when the *Tiger* was

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45. Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 63 (2 January 1858). See Catherine Petroski, *A Bride's Passage: Susan Hathorn's Year Under Sail* (Boston, 1997), 29; Stammers, 'Sailing-Ship Seafarers', 153; Druett, *She was*, 31.

46. Williams, 'The Voyage', 107 (22 January 1860).

47. Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 53 (31 March 1846).

48. Stammers, 'Sailing-Ship Seafarers', 153; Druett, *She was*, 32; Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 42; Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 31 (22 January 1846), 49 (15 March 1846), 350–1 (4 November 1848), 377 (15 June 1849); Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 48 (17 January 1848), 53 (15 February 1848); Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 38 (24 April 1872); Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 7 (28 December 1856), 20 (18–19 March 1857); Crapo, 'Journal', 23 February 1866, 26 February 1866, 27 March 1866.

49. Latva, *Giant Squid*, 153–4; Stammers, 'Sailing-Ship Seafarers', 148, 153–4; Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 76; Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 28 (11 January 1846), 29 (13 January 1846), 342 (5 August 1848); Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 12 (3 June 1871), 39 (8 June 1872); Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 18 (9 March 1857); Crapo, 'Journal', 23 February 1866, 12 May 1866. On merchant ships it was the same; Susan Hathorn writes about a caught shark: 'a huge fellow, more than ten feet long' (Petroski, *A Bride's Passage*, 29).

50. Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 12 (3 June 1871).

51. Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 32 (22 January 1846).

52. Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 32, 55.

53. Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 33 (23 January 1846).

homeward-bound: 'a sunfish was close to the ship. I could not keep from laughing at the earnestness of all hands to have him killed ... For tea had some of it which in taste resembles lobster'.<sup>54</sup> On the ships, the women did not have the possibility to grow any plants, and they could not cook. They mention this quite often, so it must have been hard for them to regularly eat the bad food that the ship's cook had prepared. In their own homes, the wives had the responsibilities of a normal middle-class housewife.<sup>55</sup> What they could do instead on the ship was to describe the look and taste of these new dishes. Annie Ricketson wrote in her journal how a mate caught a turtle, and she was called on deck to look at it: 'We had some of him made into soup for dinner ... For tea we had some of the liver and meat fried. The liver was the nicest I ever eat'.<sup>56</sup> All kinds of fish and birds were marvelled at. Nonetheless, these animals were still caught and used as food or other kinds of commodities for humans, in much the same way as domestic animals.

The most important thing in these encounters with marine animals was the idea of a shared experience. Marine animals or birds were entertainment, which provided a reason to do something or to witness something, and as such they were important to the whole ship's society.<sup>57</sup> As Mary Brewster wrote, they were events that the wives also had to see: 'Heard a loud noise on deck this morning and was soon called to see a shark which they had caught'. A day later, they were trying to catch another shark with a piece of pork on a hook, but the line parted and 'down went shark pork hook and all to the great disappointment of his captors'. Brewster continues by relating that she understood completely why everyone on the ship was always pleased if they caught something, because the passage was so monotonous; she added: 'I often take as much interest as they do if it is not as perceptible'.<sup>58</sup>

This conveys that the wives experienced things together with the crew and shared with them common feelings such as joy, surprise or frustration. It really did not matter who saw something from the ship – it became an experience for all.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, the crew, the mates or the husband always wanted to show different kinds of animals to the wives; maybe it was not new to them but they knew that it would interest the wives. Eliza Williams wrote: 'The Mate brought me the strangest looking fish I ever saw'.<sup>60</sup> Sometimes, they saw something that was new to the whole society. Mary Lawrence wrote: 'It proved to be a diamond fish. They are seldom taken. It was considered a great curiosity, none on board having seen one dead before'.<sup>61</sup>

However, the wives were not always enthusiastic about new experiences. Mary Brewster wrote about a seal that had been killed. Her husband wanted her to see the seal before it was skinned: 'I dressed then went up to see the wonder, looked at it and

54. Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 296 (27 October 1847).

55. Norling, 'Ahab's Wife', 70, 79–80.

56. Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 16–17 (20 August 1871).

57. Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 30–1 (19 January 1846); Crapo, 'Journal', 28 March 1866.

58. Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 53–4 (31 March and 1 April 1846).

59. Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 38 (24 April 1872).

60. Williams, 'The Voyage', 48–9 (12 April 1859).

61. Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 18 (9 March 1857).

then came below, when casting my eyes to the watch saw to my consternation that it was scarcely half past 5'.<sup>62</sup> And when Henrietta Deblois was called on deck to see a dying dolphin, she refused to go – the suffering of the animal was too much for her to deal with.<sup>63</sup>

While previous research claims that these women took no part in the actions on deck, these examples show that the women spent time on deck and often saw the same things as the rest of the crew, the mates or the captain, and it was the crew, the mates or the captain that often called them there. The wives were not outsiders; they were accustomed to many things that were already familiar to the others. At the same time, they exercised their right not to be part of the common doings and fuss if they considered it to be too cruel or something they were not interested in seeing.

## The whale: a wonder and a monster

It was the presence of a whale that made the day. Mary Lawrence wrote from the Bering Sea in September 1857: 'Whales in abundance. It is a grand sight to see them ploughing through the sea, rising to breathe. If they were aware of their strength, how few would be safe'.<sup>64</sup> When in the whaling grounds, the wives wrote daily that they 'saw whales' or that they 'saw no whales'. This was the solid ground for what would happen next. Normally, the text continues with the same kind of contradictory 'catch whales' or 'couldn't get any, chased without success'.<sup>65</sup>

To the whaling captains' wives, the whale was different to any other animal.<sup>66</sup> 'These fish are truly one of the wonderful works of God and well may we think that everything in the deep is wonderful', Eliza Williams wrote when she saw a right whale for the first time. In nineteenth-century whaling literature, a whale was considered to be a big fish, and this is what the wives also often wrote when describing the whale.<sup>67</sup> Whales played an exclusive role not only because they were so magnificent but also because they were the sole reason why this whole group of humans spent years on a ship. They were also something that the wives eagerly wanted to see, at first because it was a new experience and then, when the journey progressed, because it was so important for their husbands, the whole crew and the outcome of the voyage.

Whales were animals that could not be seen at home. Because they lived in the sea, they had a kind of exotic remoteness that separated them from many familiar animals. On the other hand, the wives had heard much about whales from their husbands and other relatives who worked on whaling ships. Eliza Williams wrote: 'They are a much handsomer fish than I had

62. Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 82 (28 May 1846).

63. Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 42.

64. Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 46–7 (2 September 1857).

65. Penniman, *Whaling Voyage*, 7 December 1864, 25 February 1865, 21 June 1865, 2 May 1867; Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 95 (9 June 1858), 121 (23–24 August 1858), 184 (22 August 1859); Crapo, 'Journal', 12 July 1865.

66. Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 37 (25 November 1847); Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 9–10 (13 January 1857), 38–9 (21 June 1857).

67. Williams, *The Voyage*, 32 (4 December 1858); Joe Roman, *Whale* (London, 2006), 99–101.

an idea they were'.<sup>68</sup> A strong tradition of writing about the sea and the voyages also emerged. Whalers, scientists, explorers and travellers all wrote about their journeys, and maritime writing produced both published and unpublished texts – for example, *Moby-Dick* was first published in 1851. At the same time, the expansion of museums and aquariums from the 1850s onwards combined entertainment with education.<sup>69</sup>

Despite science's focus on classifying and categorising nature, seeing animals as wonders and spectacles still prevailed. Eliza Williams wrote:

It certainly is the greatest sight that I ever saw in my life. I would like to explain it so that anyone could imagine how the Whale looks, but I have no language at will ... The head is monstrous.<sup>70</sup>

When reading the numerous texts concerning whales and hunting, we can very plainly see the contradiction in how the whale was experienced. On the one hand, it was a wonderful and playful, and maybe also innocent, wild animal. On the other, it was a 'monster of the deep', which had an active part in the hunt. Lucy Ann Crapo wrote: 'I have been gratified by the sight of the monster of the deep. Truly, he is one'.<sup>71</sup>

When the ships were in the whaling grounds, the journals were filled with writings about whales, the hunt, and the whole process and business of whaling.<sup>72</sup> The wives could also write about the different kinds of observations which meant that whales were close by. Lucy Ann Crapo wrote: 'Saw turtle and squid, which augurs good'.<sup>73</sup> This was linked to the transformation of the whale from an animal to a resource, and everything that the whale did and its actions meant either more money or a longer journey for the whalers. The usual way for the wives to describe a whale was to tell of how big it was or how much oil they got from it. The whale was either good or bad depending on how much oil and bone it produced.<sup>74</sup> One of the differences between whales and other animals arose from the fact that hunting whales was a dangerous business. The wives always worried about their husband's safety during the hunt.

68. Williams, *The Voyage*, 20 (8 November 1858).

69. Latva, *Giant Squid*, 84; Kalof, *Animals*, 145; Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean*, 4, 18–19, 21, 103–6.

70. Williams, *The Voyage*, 76 (17 July 1859). See also Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean*, 139; Crapo, 'Journal', 2 March 1865.

71. Crapo, 'Journal', 2 March 1866. See also Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 50 (18 March 1846); Williams, *One Whaling Family*, 25 (10 November 1858), 194 (8 August 1861).

72. Williams, *The Voyage*, 21 (8 November 1858); Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 389 (21 July 1849); Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 49 (23 January 1848); Penniman, *Whaling Voyage*, 31 August 1865, 11 September 1865, 24 September 1865, 17 May 1867, 21–22 May 1867; Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 38 (21 June 1857), 45 (19 August 1857), 181 (15 August 1859); Crapo, 'Journal', 14 April 1866. On merchant ships, wives also mentioned seeing whales; on 14 July 1910, Dorothea Balano mentions seeing a school of whales, but it is only one solitary sentence, without any feeling (Balano, *The Log*, 9).

73. Crapo, 'Journal', 5 April 1867.

74. Roman, *Whale*, 82, 99–100; Davis et al., *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 137; Brewster, 'Sister Sailor', 304 (29 December 1847), 350–1 (4 December 1848); Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 54 (30 May 1873), 68 (26 December 1873).

Hunting is an activity where humans desire the death of an animal – in this case, a whale – but they cannot demand it and the death is not inevitable. In hunting, the death of the animal has to be fought for, and the animal can present a challenge to the hunters. This was definitely the case in regard to whaling in the nineteenth century. Whales had many ways to escape from hunters and, when they were in distress, they could also attack.<sup>75</sup> Mary Lawrence wrote: ‘the whale capsized the boat, throwing all hands into the water instantly ... the whale made a second attack ... he made a dash at the boat and stove it almost to atoms’.<sup>76</sup>

The most impressive thing when analysing the ways in which the wives accepted the world of whale-hunting is to read the stories about hunting the whale mother by first catching the calf. This was something with which the men also expressed sympathy.<sup>77</sup> Mary Brewster wrote:

The only way they can get fast is to chase the calf till it gets tired out then they fasten to it and the whale will remain by its side and is then fastened too ... he saw a calf fastened to and the whale came up to it and tried to get the iron out with her fin and when she could not she took it on her back and endeavoured to get it away ... when this is the case the whale when finding her young one dead will turn and fight the boats.<sup>78</sup>

It was a common method used by the crews of the ships the wives were sailing in, and a mundane part of whaling. It was an ambivalent theme, and many of the wives felt that they had to write about it. This strategy was destructive in many ways. Because whales had only one calf, it was devastating to the whale population to kill the sole calf, particularly when it was done in order to catch the mother.<sup>79</sup> The logic was that the mother would not leave her calf behind and that was when the hunters had their chance. Eliza Williams wrote:

Soon he came alongside and told us that they had struck and killed a cow and a calf ... They chased them 3 h[ours] and would not have got them likely, had it not been for the calf. The mother was so anxious about it that she would turn back to look for it.<sup>80</sup>

In the mid nineteenth century, the mortality rate for infants was significantly high. Women gave birth to children who did not live into adulthood.<sup>81</sup> Is this a reason why they accepted the death of the whale calf? Eliza Williams wrote, after being on board

75. Garry Marvin, ‘Wild Killing’, in Animal Studies Group, *Killing Animals*, 12; Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 33; Davis et al., *In Pursuit of Leviathan*, 151.

76. Lawrence, *Captain’s Best Mate*, 190–1 (3 September 1859).

77. Roman, *Whale*, 61, 80; Druett, *She was*, 177; Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 57–8; Brewster, ‘Sister Sailor’, 181 (19 January 1847); Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 50 (9 April 1872); Lawrence, *Captain’s Best Mate*, 42 (15 July 1857).

78. Brewster, *Sister Sailor*, 181 (19.1.1847).

79. Roman, *Whale*, 113–14; Scott Forbes, *A Natural History of Families* (Princeton, NJ, 2005), 21.

80. Williams, *The Voyage*, 76 (16 July 1859).

81. Forbes, *Natural History*, 98.

only a few months, that she was sorry when she heard that the dead cow whale had a calf. Nevertheless, she did not judge or criticise the hunt or the hunters: 'The poor little thing could not keep with the rest, the mother would not leave it and lost her life'. Eliza then recounts how the first mate told her about whales: 'He says they exhibit the most affection for their young of any dumb animal he ever saw'.<sup>82</sup> However, Eliza continues the day's writing by relating how whales had damaged one boat and being fearful because of the boats that were out of sight of the ship. She turns her mind to people and their difficulties, forgetting the dead whale.

However, Eliza Williams and some of the other wives wrote another kind of text, where they expressed some sympathy towards whales, and there is a tendency for these sentiments to appear more towards the end of their journey. It is difficult to know why Eliza sometimes felt that she did not want to watch: 'I did not like to look at the poor whale in his misery any longer and so came down below to write a few words about it'.<sup>83</sup> Eliza wrote this at the end of her journey and she was probably tired of the whole whaling business. Maybe she had seen too much killing on that one journey. Now that she knew that they did not need any more whales, and that they were going home, her feelings were with the whale. Maybe now she thought that she had her own position on the ship and she could choose not to watch.

In studies about animals in human history in modern times, it has been theorised in at least two different ways: first, how women or the suppressed working class have empathised with hunted or tortured animals and, second, how the upper class thought that the idea of preventing cruelty towards animals needed to be spread among the lower classes, which needed to be morally uplifted anyway.<sup>84</sup> According to this reading, women have been somehow closer to nature and animals than men, but the upper classes showed more kindness towards animals than the lower classes.<sup>85</sup> Neither of these theories seems to apply to the whaling wives. The lack of personal feelings when considering these events in their texts is confusing because the stories about the calves and their mothers are truly sad. On the other hand, there is so much writing concerning this 'hunting method' that it must have been a subject that the women wanted to come to terms with by writing about it in their journals. Because it was normal for everyone else on the ship, the women chose to accept it. This says a great deal about how they adjusted to the ship's rules and society as a whole.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the first laws against cruelty to animals were passed.<sup>86</sup> The USA followed this example and, in 1835, Massachusetts passed a

82. Williams, *The Voyage*, 24 (9 November 1858).

83. Williams, *The Voyage*, 201 (23 September 1861). See also Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 165 (29 May 1859).

84. Ritvo, *Noble Cows*, 56; Kalof, *Animals*, 142–3; Miller, *Empire*, 71–2.

85. Diane L. Beers, *For the Prevention of Cruelty: The History and Legacy of Animal Rights Activism in the United States* (Athens, OH, 2006), 52; Oerlemans, *Romanticism*, 7–8; Danahay Martin A., 'Nature Red Hoof and Paw: Domestic Animals and Violence in Victorian Art' in *Victorian Animal Dreams. Representations of Animals in Victorian Literature and Culture* eds. Denenholz Morse Deborah & Danahay Martin A. (Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham, Surrey, England 2007), pp.100–101.

86. Kalof, *Animals*, 137; Oerlemans, *Romanticism*, 75; Druett, *Petticoat Whalers*, 55.



law where cruelty towards a domestic animal became a misdemeanour. However, it was not until 1866 that an organised animal welfare movement emerged in the USA. Human ideas about animal welfare and animal subjectivity were changing during the Victorian era, but this did not mean that the majority of people showed any consideration for animal rights.<sup>87</sup> At sea, the wives did not criticise the hunting of whales or express that it was cruel. The exploitation of nature had religious sanction and the stocks of different marine animals seemed to be inexhaustible. This attitude was universal and unquestioned among seafarers.<sup>88</sup> As Mary Lawrence demonstrated, a bomb exploding inside a whale was a normal thing to write about: ‘he could not in all probability live long, as there had been two bomb lances fired at him, one of which they heard explode inside of him’.<sup>89</sup> After the whales were dead, the descriptions turn to focus on the pure mass of the whale. When the animal stops moving, the material side becomes important.<sup>90</sup> People had to kill animals for food all the time at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and seeing blood was not unusual as animals were slaughtered in backyards. However, there were also changes happening: slaughterhouses emerged from the early nineteenth century as part of the transition to the industrial era.<sup>91</sup> After waiting nearly two months to capture their first whale, Mary Brewster wrote in her journal when they finally caught one: ‘I saw the whole transaction from the ship and think this is the first time I could willingly see blood shed so freely’. She also wrote that she sat for the rest of the day in one of the boats watching the whale being dissected.<sup>92</sup>

After spending years on a whaling ship and cruising the Arctic whaling grounds every summer, the wives were accustomed to the hunt.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, the whale was transformed in the minds of the wives from a wonder of nature to oil and money. Eliza Williams wrote: ‘they struck him ... putting two irons into him. He ran badly some of the time and fought a good deal ... I got the Baby to sleep and went on deck to see the fun’.<sup>94</sup> Profit became increasingly important as the seasons passed and the ship began to fill with whale bone and barrels of oil. At this stage of the voyage, the wives acknowledged the amount of oil obtained from a whale almost every time they wrote about a whale being caught.<sup>95</sup>

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87. Deborah Denenholz Morse and Martin A. Danahay, ‘Introduction’, in Denenholz Morse and Danahay, *Victorian Animal Dreams*, 10; Rothfels, ‘Killing Elephants’, 60–1; Gianquitto, *Good Observers*, 131; Beers, *Prevention of Cruelty*, 27, 29, 37, 74.

88. Gianquitto, *Good Observers*, 9; Stammers, ‘Sailing-Ship Seafarers’, 155.

89. Lawrence, *Captain’s Best Mate*, 162 (11 May 1859).

90. Williams, *The Voyage*, 9–10 (29 September 1858).

91. Amy J. Fitzgerald, ‘A Social History of the Slaughterhouse: From Inception to Contemporary Implications’, *Human Ecology Review*, 17, No. 1 (2010), 59–61; Beers, *Prevention of Cruelty*, 36.

92. Brewster, ‘*Sister Sailor*’, 91 (17 June 1846).

93. Druett, *She was*, 143.

94. Williams, *The Voyage*, 180 (3 June 1861).

95. Penniman, *Whaling Voyage*, 25 August 1865, 24 September 1865, 9 October 1865, 15 March 1867, 19 June 1867; Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 50–51 (12 April 1873), 55 (1 June 1873); Lawrence, *Captain’s Best Mate*, 20 (16 March 1857); Crapo, ‘*Journal*’, 21 January 1867, 14 March 1867.

Eliza Williams summed up the general opinion: 'It is truly wonderful to me, the whole process, from taking the great, and truly wonderful monster of the deep till the oil is in the casks'.<sup>96</sup> A whale was something that produced money, and the captain and his wife wondered what the price for oil and whalebone would be when they reached their home market.<sup>97</sup> This was another way for the wives to be part of the general feelings on the ship – by participating in the calculations about the financial outcome of the voyage. It was common for the women who lived in New England to understand the economic importance of whale fishing. They knew that every whale brought them nearer to home.<sup>98</sup>

Mary Brewster wrote about whaling on 1 July 1846: 'I am perfectly willing to be along when whaling is the business'.<sup>99</sup> Captains' wives adopted the maritime world's ideas and values, which previously only applied to men. Their writings about whales must be seen as part of the wider discussion on the ships, expressing simultaneously how they were connected to the general atmosphere on board. They needed a lot of information about the hunt and the whales in order to write in this way.<sup>100</sup> This clearly indicates that the women were on deck and witnessed the hunt and the whales at first hand. The wives did not write about whales without a human perspective and they could choose what to write about.<sup>101</sup> If they had not been interested, they would have left it out of their journals.

## Conclusion

Two themes arise from the writings of the captains' wives about marine animals and whales. The first is that the wives experienced the marine animals in association with the rest of the crew. The animals created an interaction that would not have happened otherwise. Even if the wives had their own space on the whaling ship, and even if they were outsiders because of their gender and their status as a captain's wife, it was possible to connect with the rest of the crew through the common experience that the marine animals and whales presented. This shows that women could be a visible part of the ship's society.

These women fulfilled the ideals of their time by depicting the animals closely, and they were genuinely interested in the new environment in which they now lived. The numerous writings about marine animals and the way these women wrote about whale-

96. Williams, *The Voyage*, 31 (3 December 1858).

97. Roman, *Whale*, 68; Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 13 (1 July 1871); Lawrence, *Captain's Best Mate*, 115 (1 August 1858).

98. Schell, '*Bold and Hardy*', 150; Brewster, '*Sister Sailor*', 107–108 (25 July 1846).

99. Brewster, '*Sister Sailor*', 100 (1 July 1846).

100. Druett, *She was*, 70–3, 91; Brown, *She Went a-Whaling*, 47 (13 January 1848); Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 64 (15 October 1873); Crapo, '*Journal*', 14 July 1866; Williams, *The Voyage*, 8–9 (28–29 September 1858), 31–2 (4 December 1858), 138 (26 May 1860); Crapo, '*Journal*', 21 March 1866.

101. Brewster, '*Sister Sailor*', 102–5 (7 July 1846–18 July 1846), 337–338 (13 July 1848); Ricketson, *Whaling Journal*, 14–15 (5 July 1871–25 July 1871); Penniman, *Whaling Voyage*, 28 April 1867; Crapo, '*Journal*', 16 January 1867.

hunting during the hunting seasons confirm that they ventured out from their cabins, they knew what was happening on the ship and they wanted to be part of the action. They were also requested to come and see the animals or whales by the rest of the crew, the mates or the captain.

The second theme is that although the women could sometimes feel pity when great animals had to die, they never questioned the actual hunt. For the other marine animals that were killed, they showed no pity at all. These wild and often hard-to-catch marine animals and whales were primarily a resource for everyone on the ship. They were food, oil and bone. The captains' wives truly wanted the hunters to succeed in their work and rejoiced with the rest when the hunt was a triumph. For the wives, a good profit meant that their husbands could stay home for longer or even permanently.


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