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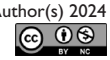

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‘The Song of the Innuit’: Circulating Arctic ethnographic knowledge through verse

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Abstract
This article seeks to advance recent literatures exploring the important role of poetry in the production and circulation of geographical knowledge. It does this by critically analysing a poem that was written by the traveller and scholar Wiliam Healey Dall during the 1899 Harriman Alaska Expedition. This leisurely excursion travelled along the coastlines of Alaska and the Siberian peninsula, and involved a series of encounters with the indigenous Yupik/Yup’ik communities inhabiting this region. It was these encounters that provided the basis for Dall’s problematic poem. As the analysis presented demonstrates, this pseudo-ethnographic poem contained a range of ‘temperate normative’ descriptions of these indigenous Arctic peoples. This in turn perpetuated erroneous depictions of these peoples within the geographical imaginations of non-indigenous peoples across Europe and North America. The article therefore argues that geographers and other scholars must take poetry and other forms of verse seriously as a crucial means by which geographical knowledges pertaining to indigenous peoples were circulated during the long 19th century. This will in turn reveal their vital role in supporting and justifying troubling colonial interventions into the lives of indigenous peoples across the Arctic and beyond.

Keywords
Arctic, knowledge, geopoetics, poetry, indigenous, Yupik, Yup’ik, Inuit, William Healey Dall

On 21st April 1915, a banquet was held at the Cosmos Club in Washington, D.C. to commemorate the traveller and naturalist Dr William Healey Dall who had dedicated 50 years of service to scientific enquiry.[1] A series of toasts was delivered by the assembled members of this prestigious learned society, celebrating Dall’s contributions to various disciplines including Palaeontology, Zoology, and scientific nomenclature. Two of the toasts, however, did not focus on Dall’s sustained study of

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the natural environment. One, offered by Prof. William Holmes, celebrated the advances that Dall had made to anthropology, while another, delivered by the attorney Justice Wendell Stafford, was a toast in recognition of 'Dall the poet'.[2] The focus of these latter two speeches in many ways runs contrary to the prevailing historical depiction of Dall which focuses almost exclusively on his scholarly interests in natural history.[3] As this article will show, however, Dall's contributions to both anthropology and poetry certainly require closer investigation.

The purpose of the article is to study a particular poem written by Dall that is thoroughly anthropological in nature. Entitled 'The Song of the Innuit,' the poem comprises a crude ethnographic description of the practices and traditions carried out by the Indigenous peoples that have historically inhabited the 'Beringia' region of Northwest Alaska and the coastlines of Siberia.[4] The poem was written while Dall was travelling in this region as part of the Harriman Alaska Expedition – a leisurely intellectual excursion that had been organised and funded by the wealthy railway magnate Edward Harriman.[5] The poem was in turn printed within the *Harriman Alaska Series* – a collection of scientific reports that were published following the expedition's completion.[6] The various pieces of ethnographic information pertaining to the Inuit that were contained within the poem were therefore able to circulate to readers across North America and Europe.

The analysis presented here studies three key aspects of Dall's intriguing yet problematic poem. Firstly, the expeditionary circumstances in which the poem was produced are examined. Studying the published accounts and the unpublished handwritten journals produced by several members of the expedition, the convivial intellectual atmosphere on board the *SS George W. Elder* amidst which Dall's poem was written is analysed. Secondly, the article teases out the various pieces of ethnographic information that are contained within the poem and analyses the racialized assumptions that lay behind them. There are a number of spurious or simply erroneous representations of Inuit contained within the poem, and the article will explain how these were connected to wider racialized representations of Indigenous Arctic peoples (and indeed non-European peoples more generally) that were in circulation throughout Europe and North American at the time. Finally, the circulatory pathways that Dall's poem undertook will be also traced. Reflecting on its inclusion within the *Harriman Alaska Series*, the article will consider the extent to which Dall sought to use this 'song' as a means to communicate Arctic ethnographic information to a readership beyond the members of the expedition.

As a whole, the article therefore reveals important insights into how Arctic ethnographic information was communicated during this *fin de siècle* period. It reflects on the important yet overlooked role that poetry played in shaping North American and European understandings of the peoples inhabiting the circumpolar North, and considers the problematic imaginaries of Inuit that were constructed through such media. The article thus concludes by arguing that geographers and other scholars interested in histories of exploration, colonial encounters and the circulation of all forms of knowledge must take seriously these diverse forms of ethnographic literature in order to understand the complex ways in which knowledge about the world and its inhabitants was shaped during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Exploring poetry, rhyme and verse

While geography has had a long and enduring relationship with poetry, the discipline has seen a recent resurgence of engagement with this particular literary form.[7] Scholars associated with the 'geopoetics' movement have demonstrated the opportunities available when geographical knowledge is brought into dialogue with poetry and other forms of verse.[8] These authors have recognised the extraordinary potential for poetry to inscribe our world in different ways, and have thus created

various poetic materials that offer radical alternatives to the more traditional modes of geographical representation.[9] Such media can challenge, or provide alternatives to, prevailing modes of scholarly expression which can be inherently restrictive or may be complicit in reproducing problematic power hierarchies.[10]

It is important to note, however, that geographers have been equally interested in analysing poetry that has been written and produced by others.[11] Closely related to the subdiscipline of literary geographies, geographers have turned to poetry in order to interpret the 'geographical imagination' of the poet(s) in question.[12] Incorporating insights from earlier work in cultural and historical geography, the geopoetics movement has examined the ways in which individuals, both in the past and in the present, have represented our planet and its inhabitants using creative and diverse media.[13] Scholars have shown that by studying poetry (and similar forms of literary expression) geographers can gain unique insights into the establishment of particular worldviews and the formation of particular geographical – and often hierarchical or unequal – relationships. Furthermore, analysis of poetry can reveal otherwise difficult to reach insights into the wider geographical settings amidst which the poems themselves were created.

Analysis of poetry, songs and other forms of verse has also been undertaken by scholars engaged in critical exploration studies.[14] Researchers in this field have called for investigation into the particular forms of poetry that were produced during voyages of exploration. Encouraging closer analysis of 19th century poetry that was written at sea for example, literary historians Hester Blum and Jason Rudy, have explained that:

> The archive of shipboard poetry itself may open today a range of possible readings outside the land-based norm[;] . . . for discovering literary coteries at the scene of their labor; for theories of exchange, travel, and community; and for prolific literary traditions that have hitherto gone missing.[15]

Study of songs and poems produced during maritime voyages has therefore revealed a particular set of literary practices and conventions that are notably different to those that are found in terrestrial or sedentary circumstances. Such work has highlighted the importance of studying the social and environmental conditions in which poetry is written in order to appreciate the extent to which a combination of mobility and isolation from wider society influenced both the traveller-poets themselves and the poems they created.

Of particular relevance to this article, there has also been scholarly interest in studying forms of verse that were produced during travel and exploration in the Polar regions. In the Arctic context, Erika Behrisch argues that the writing of songs and poetry during 19th century Arctic expeditions emerged as a response to the restrictive style of reporting that was typically used to narrate these journeys.[16] Attempting to circumvent the restrictions of the 'official' published accounts that 'reflected and celebrated the rationality, determination, and logic of the Victorian mind,' Arctic travellers experimented with alternative literary styles and more creative media through which to document their experiences, emotions and sentiments.[17] Poetry in particular flourished in these environments, and Behrisch notes that 'the subject matter of these poems both complemented *and contrasted* with the foci of the official scientific narratives.'[18] Poetry therefore permitted the creation of alternative or otherwise 'unsanctioned' perspectives on Arctic voyages and these were in turn recorded and communicated in various ways, creating often unpredictable afterlives for the poems following the completion of the expedition.

It is interesting to note that similar processes were taking place at the opposite ends of the earth. Carolyn Philpott and Elizabeth Leane have studied the 'sledging songs' written by explorers in the Antarctic regions as they hauled their sleds across challenging icy landscapes during the late

19th and early 20th century period.[19] Again pointing to the opportunities that poetry and song could offer in terms of emotional expression, these authors also explain that such activities were in fact vitally important in staving off the dreaded 'polar depression' that was a regular feature of travel in these intemperate regions.[20] Hester Blum similarly explains that keeping the mind active by focussing on various literary tasks including the writing, and even printing, of textual media was a vital strategy deployed by Polar travellers to overcome these psychological difficulties.[21]

This diverse body of literature has therefore demonstrated that sustained analysis of the poetry and songs produced during voyages of exploration offers significant potential for understanding the wider social and cultural environments in which such media were created. It also provides crucial insights into the ways in which regions of the world were depicted and represented by travellers as they traversed these diverse landscapes and environments. Expeditionary poetry described the world as it was experienced by the traveller-poet, but crucially, also created the world anew. Poems also excited geographical imaginations across Europe and North America upon the travellers' return, and thus reified exotic imaginaries of the wider world in complex and often problematic ways.[22]

The remainder of this article seeks to contribute to these literatures by offering analysis of a particular form of expeditionary poetry that has not yet attracted sustained scholarly attention. It analyses a poem, written during a voyage of exploration in the Arctic, that is ostensibly ethnographic in nature. As Kent Maynard and Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor note, there has been limited analysis of poetry that was written as a means of depicting and describing Indigenous peoples.[23] This is because extant examples of such writings are very rare. Explaining the reluctance for ethnographers to produce poetry of this type, these authors explain that 'to mention poetry in academic study . . . risked the impression that one's research was less a work of scholarship than a fictive invention.'[24] Akin to the restraints faced by the Polar explorers described above, poetry has rarely been recognised as an appropriate or sufficiently authoritative medium through which to convey ethnographic information. Yet, the poem analysed here contains information pertaining to the peoples of the North that appears, at least initially, to be authoritative in nature. It is also crucial to bear in mind that, as Dall turned his poetic attention towards the characteristics of the human beings he encountered, an important set of problematic racial hierarchies were established in the process. The poem contains crude and, in many cases, erroneous descriptions of Inuit, consequently exoticizing and marginalising these Indigenous Arctic inhabitants. It must therefore be analysed in a critical and cautious way in order to tease out the problematic constructions and spurious representations of Arctic communities it contains. We must also remember that such depictions are inextricably intertwined with historical processes of colonial intervention, imperial control and racialized violence that have been an enduring feature of Indigenous lives across the circumpolar Arctic.[25] However, as the literatures above make clear, before sustained critique of this poem can begin, it is important to investigate both the physical and social environments amidst which it was created.

The Harriman Alaska expedition

In 1899, the wealthy railway magnate Edward Harriman decided he wished to travel in the newly acquired US territory of Alaska.[26] He invited a large group of naturalists keen to study the various flora and fauna that were to be found in this vast, and as yet relatively 'unexplored' area, to accompany him and his family during the journey.[27] An assortment of artists, photographers, collectors and taxidermists joined Harriman on the expedition to ensure that the various natural history specimens found en route could be collected and recorded in detail. Historians William Goetzmann and

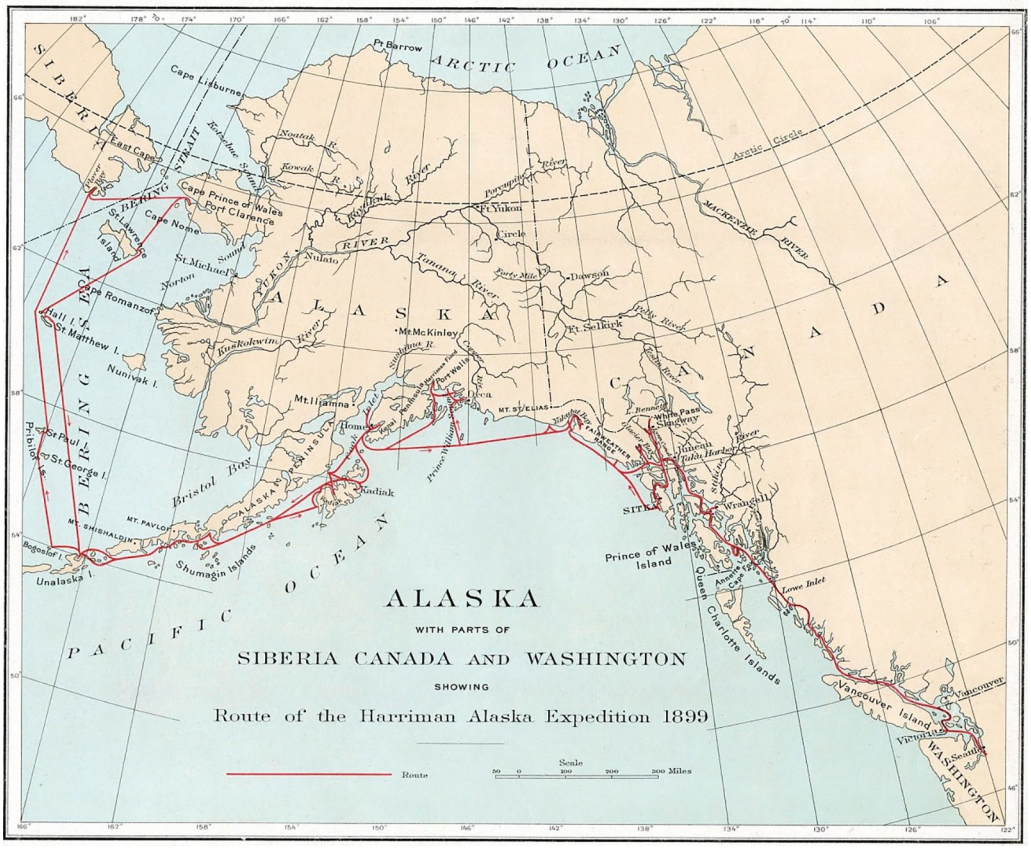


Figure 1. Route of the Harriman Alaska Expedition 1899.[29]
Source: Burroughs et al. (1910).

Kay Sloan have described the expedition as a 'floating think tank' and note that it maintained a strong air of upper-class exclusivity.[28] In total, a group of 126 men, women and children set sail from Seattle on the 23rd May 1899 and began their journey along the Pacific coastline to learn more about the Northernmost regions of the American continent (see Figure 1).

The expedition made several stops along the route, with the crew regularly disembarking the *SS George W. Elder* to examine various topographical features and inspect a variety of natural history specimens. These investigations were then discussed by the group at the end of each day, with 'nearly every evening an informal lecture or talk on some subject connected with the work of the Expedition, and illustrated by blackboard sketches, given in the main cabin'.[30] It is clear that intellectual exchange was a key aspect of this urbane Arctic expedition, with polite discussion regularly taking place pertaining to the latest contributions to knowledge that had been made.[31]

Importantly, these discussions were not restricted to the lectures presented on board the ship. The regular sharing of ideas is also evidenced by the handwritten journals belonging to the various members of the expedition.[32] Studying the diary belonging to the artist Louis Agassiz Fuertes, for example, it is clear that a degree of literary exchange was also taking place as the ship made its way through the Beringian landscape.[33] While the notebook is primarily filled with detailed drawings

of the various birdlife that Fuertes had observed during the journey, the final pages contain an intriguing series of handwritten poems. These poems had been written by various members of the expedition party and indicate that, as noted in the literatures above, the writing of poetry had been a regular recreational activity. While the poems had most likely been used as a means of staving off boredom during the prolonged Arctic voyage, the large number of contributors also suggests that they had been used to foster a sense of camaraderie amongst the diverse expedition party on board. Furthermore, the poems had clearly been written in response to the events that had recently taken place during the expedition, referring to the wildlife and geographical features that had been witnessed. One event in particular forms the focus of the poem analysed in this article. As the expedition crossed into the Arctic Circle, the focus of these poetic descriptions changed, and attention was turned towards the peoples inhabiting this boreal region.

Encounters at Plover Bay

The expedition crossed the Bering Strait and travelled along the Siberian peninsula, entering the small natural harbour referred to at the time as 'Plover Bay.' Here, the party disembarked the ship and set about inspecting the flora and fauna found along the shoreline.[34] Importantly though, as the photographs taken during the expedition reveal (Figure 2), the party also made

Figure 2. Members of the Harriman Alaska expedition interacting with the Yupik community.[39]
Source: Anonymous (1899).

contact with members of the Indigenous Yupik community who had established a settlement in the bay. Describing the scene as the curious travellers approached the community, the naturalist John Burroughs wrote 'on this sand spit was an Eskimo [sic] encampment of skin-covered huts which was soon astir with moving forms'.[35] The account then explains that an impromptu trading relationship was established between the two groups, with the Yupik offering skins and 'curios' in exchange for knives and pieces of cloth.[36] The travellers were also keen to examine the Yupik encampment up close. As Burroughs then explains, 'they were not shy of our cameras and freely admitted us to the greasy and smoky interiors of their dwellings'.[37] It is important to note here that the Yupik community were not necessarily surprised by the sudden arrival of these curious scientific observers. Regular traffic through the Bering Strait meant that communities along the Beringian coastlines were well-accustomed to travellers from the South arriving on their shores.[38] The Yupik therefore saw the arrival of the Harriman Alaska Expedition as simply another opportunity to acquire useful items and tools and gladly welcomed the group into their camp.

As the remainder of this article will now demonstrate, however, these encounters at Plover Bay were particularly significant for one member of the expedition. William Healey Dall watched closely as his companions engaged with the Yupik, and studied with interest the practices and customs being carried out by these Beringian inhabitants. Importantly, as alluded to above, these observations would go on to form the basis of his expeditionary poetry.

'The Song of the Innuit'

As the members of expedition grew weary of the low temperatures and high winds of the Siberian peninsula, they re-embarked the ship and charted a course back across the Bering Strait to the shelter of Port Clarence. During this evening crossing, Dall presented the group of passengers with a lecture discussing the Indigenous populations that they had just left behind. Dall had in fact visited the Yupik community at Plover Bay many years before, during the 1865–67 Western Union Telegraph Expedition.[40] Importantly, he had also published several ethnographic accounts describing the inhabitants of the Siberian Peninsula.[41] The naturalist therefore considered himself an authority on all matters relating to the peoples of the Arctic and felt sufficiently informed to describe their cultures and customs to his fellow travellers.

Dall began his presentation by enthusiastically informing the passengers of the euthanistic practices that were supposedly carried out by the Yupik community. As Goetzmann and Sloan note:

> [He] entertained his companions with stories of Siberian natives [sic]. The group, he said, usually killed their old women when they grew useless, and sometimes women actually requested to be put to death.[42]

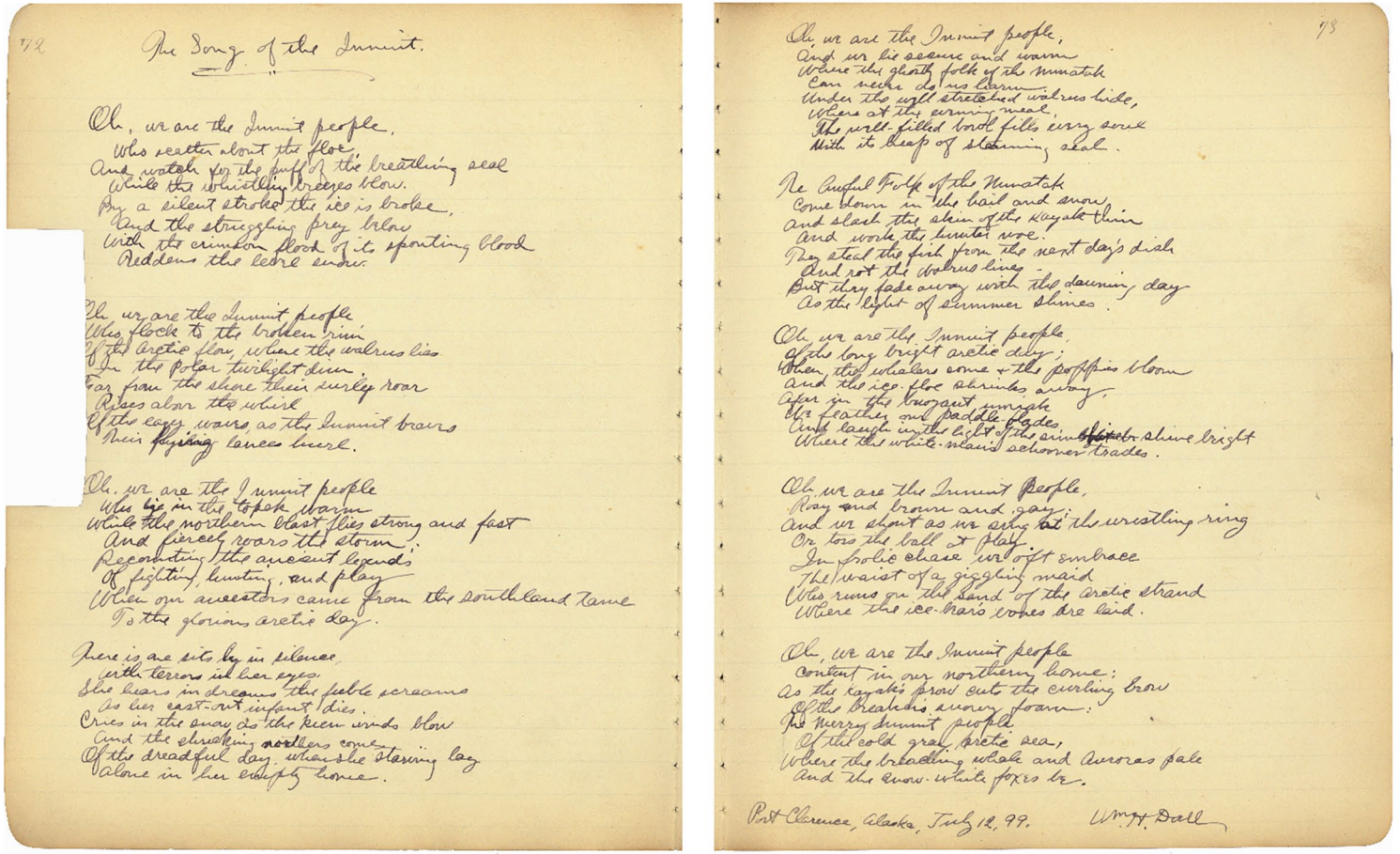
However, it is important to reflect critically on these euthanasic practices that Dall was referring to here. This is because the reports of such customs have been critiqued by scholars such as John Steckely, Frank Tester and Paule McNicoll.[43] Arguing that descriptions of such practices should in fact be considered a 'myth,' Steckley has traced the development of this idea across non-Inuit literature and concluded that 'contrary to what many non-Inuit authors say, Inuit elder suicide was not "dictated" by their culture or customs'.[44] While there is evidence of historically high rates of suicide amongst Indigenous peoples across the circumpolar Arctic, attributing these statistics to cultural tradition, rather than to the socio-economic challenges faced by people in the North – many of which are a direct result of colonial intervention – is extremely

Figure 3. Yup'ik *umiaks* approaching the *SS George W. Elder*.[47]
Source: Anonymous (1899).

problematic.[45] Yet in delivering his captivating presentation on board the *Elder* and keeping his listeners 'spellbound by fearsome tales during the long night', Dall depicted these activities as a curious, yet inherent, aspect of Yupik life and, in doing so, perpetuated a false depiction of Inuit and their practices.[46] As discussed below, similarly inaccurate representations were also to feature in Dall's ethnographic poetry.

Following the conclusion of Dall's lecture, the long Arctic day finally came to an end and the expedition members returned to their cabins for the night. However, they were awoken early the next morning by the sudden arrival of another group of Indigenous inhabitants sailing their *umiaks* alongside the ship (see Figure 3). As the ship had begun its approach into the harbour on the Alaskan coast, like the Yupik at Plover Bay, the Yup'ik situated at Port Clarence had ventured out into the Strait and sought to establish trading relationships with the travellers.

As the ship manoeuvred its way past the *umiaks* and into the port, Dall had his moment of poetic inspiration. Encouraged by his renewed acquaintance with the Yupik/Yup'ik inhabitants on both sides of the Bering Strait, and mindful of the lecture he had given the night before, the naturalist picked up Fuertes's journal and added a new poem to the collection. The poem that Dall jotted down in the journal is shown in Figure 4 and is transcribed below.



The Song of the Innuit.

Oh, we are the Innuit people,
Who scatter about the floe
And watch for the puff of the breathing seal
While the whistling breezes blow.
By a silent stroke the ice is broke,
And the struggling prey below
With the crimson flood of its spouting blood
Reddens the level snow.

Oh we are the Innuit people
Who flock to the broken rim
Of the Arctic floe, where the walrus lies
In the polar twilight dim.
Far from the shore their surly roar
Rises above the whirl
Of the eager wave, as the Innuit bears
Their flying lances hurl.

Oh, we are the Innuit people
Who in the tupek warm
While the northern blast flies strong and fast
And fiercely roars the storm
Recounting the ancient legends
Of fighting, hunting, and play
When our ancestors came from the southland tame
To the glorious arctic day.

There is one sits by in silence
With terrors in her eyes.
She hears in dreams the feeble screams
As her east-out infant dies.
Cries in the away as the keen winds blow
And the shrieking northern comes
Of the dreadful day, when she starving lay
Alone in her empty home.

Oh we are the Innuit people,
And we live secure and warm
Where the ghastly folk of the Nunatak
Can never do us harm.
Under the well stretched walrus hide,
Where at the evening meal,
The well filled bowl fills every soul
With its heap of steaming seal.

The Awful Folk of the Nunatak
Come down in the hail and snow
And slash the skin of the kayak thin
And work the hunter woe.
They steal the fish from the next day's dish
And rot the walrus line
But they fade away with the dawning day
As the light of summer shines.

Oh we are the Innuit people
Of the long bright arctic day;
When the whalers come & the puffins bloom
And the ice floe shrinks away,
After on the buoyant umiak
With feather and paddle blades
And laugh in the light of the crimson sky to shine bright
Where the white-winged schooner trades.

Oh we are the Innuit people,
Rosy and brown and gay,
And we shout as we strive in the wrestling ring
Or toss the ball at play.
In frolic chase we oft embrace
The waist of a giggling maid
Who runs on the sand of the arctic strand
Where the ice-bars combes are laid.

Oh, we are the Innuit people
Content in our northern home;
As the kayaks prow cuts the curling brow
Of the breakers snowy foam.
The merry Innuit people
Of the cold gray arctic sea,
Where the breaching whale and Auroras pale
And the snow-white foxes be.

Port Clarence, Alaska, July 12, 99. Wm H. Dall

Figure 4. 'The Song of the Innuit' written by William Healey Dall, 12th July 1899.[48]
Source: Dall (1899).

The Song of the Innuit

Oh, we are the Innuit people,
Who scatter about the floe
And watch for the puff of the breathing seal,
While the whistling breezes blow.
By a silent stroke the ice is broke,
And the struggling prey below.
With the crimson flood of its spouting blood
Reddens the level snow.

Oh, we are the Innuit people.
Who flock to the broken rim
Of the Arctic pack where the walrus lie
In the polar twilight dim.
Far from the shore their surly roar
Rises above the whirl
Of the eager wave, as the Innuit brave
Their flying lances hurl.

Oh, we are the Innuit people,
Who lie in the topek warm;
While the northern blast flies strong and fast,
And fiercely roars the storm;
Recounting the ancient legends,
Of fighting, hunting, and play,
When our ancestors came from the southland tame,
To the glorious Arctic day

There is one sits by in silence,
With terror in her eyes:
For she hears in dreams the piteous screams
Of a cast-out babe that dies —
Dies in the snow as the keen winds blow,
And the shrieking northers come
Of that dreadful day when she starving lay,
Alone in her empty home.

Oh, we are the Innuit people,
And we lie secure and warm,
Where the ghostly folk of the Nunatak
Can never do us harm.

Under the stretching walrus-hide,
Where at the evening meal
The well-filled bowl cheers every soul,
Heaped high with steaming seal.

The Awful Folk of the Nunatak
Come down in the hail and snow,
And slash the skin of the kayak thin,
To work the hunter woe.
They steal the fish from the next day's dish.
And rot the walrus lines —
But they fade away with the dawning day.
As the light of summer shines.

Oh, we are the Innuit people.
Of the long, bright Arctic day:
When the whalers come and the poppies bloom,
And the ice-floe shrinks away:
Afar in the buoyant umiak,
We feather our paddle blades,
And laugh in the light of the sunshine bright,
Where the White Man's schooner trades.

Oh, we are the Innuit people.
Rosy and brown and gay;
And we shout as we sing at the wrestling ring,
Or toss the ball at play.
In frolic chase we oft embrace
The waist of a giggling maid
As she runs on the sand of the Arctic strand,
Where the ice-bear's bones are laid.

Oh, we are the Innuit people.
Content in our northern home;
While the kayak's prow cuts the curling brow
Of the breaker's snowy foam.
The merry Innuit people.
Of the cold, grey Arctic sea.
Where the breaching whale, the aurora pale
And the snow-white foxes be.

Port Clarence, Alaska, July 12, '99 Wm. H. Dall.[49]

As the various literatures discussed above make clear, both the content of this 'song' and the circumstances of its production indicate that it is of considerable importance to scholars for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is clear that the social and geographical environment amidst which Dall wrote the poem was key to its creation. His experiences during the expedition, and the group's interactions with the Yupik/Yup'ik communities, were obviously vital in providing the poem's inspiration. Secondly, the significant amount of ethnographic information contained in the poem is of paramount importance to scholars interested in the production of ethnographic knowledge. Describing the customs of both the Plover Bay and Port Clarence inhabitants, Dall was keen to record a variety of ethnographic details regarding the social, cultural and environmental practices that he witnessed being carried out by the Yupik/Yup'ik – and by inference the wider circumpolar Inuit. Most importantly though, the poem also provides insight into the various ways in which knowledge about the Inuit was regularly steeped in racist and/or colonial attitudes and regularly comprised misleading or erroneous information.[50] While some sections of the poem do present a broadly accurate representation of Inuit practices, on the whole Dall's poem acts to exoticize and 'other' these Arctic inhabitants in various ways.

Almost every line of the song details a different aspect of Inuit life and in turn reveals Dall's troubling perceptions of these communities. The first stanza for example, which includes the line 'watch for the puff of the breathing seal' describes the practice of *mauliq* (hunting for seals at breathing holes in the sea ice) that has long been carried out by Inuit across the Arctic.[51] Stanzas three and five, meanwhile, offer descriptions of the tent-like dwellings ('topeks' in Dall's words) observed by the travellers in Plover Bay, noting in particular the 'stretching walrus-hide' used in their construction.[52] Dall also makes multiple references to the various modes of Inuit transportation. The *umiak* is described as 'bouyant' while the *kayak* is praised for its manoeuvrability. The repeated references to what Dall terms the 'Nunatak' are also significant. While this word usually refers to mountain peaks that protrude through the glacial ice, in Dall's poem, the 'awful folk of the Nunatak' is in fact a reference to 'evil spirits' who were reported to inhabit these geographical features. Dall describes these spirits causing mischief amongst the Yupik/Yup'ik communities by 'slash[ing] the skin of the kayak thin' and 'steal[ing] the fish from the next day's dish.' A final section of Dall's poem that is also of significance is the third stanza, which includes the line 'When our ancestors came from the southland tame.' This is in fact a reference to an essay that Dall had published some years earlier contributing new insights into an ongoing scholarly debate pertaining to the 'origins of the Inuit'.[53] This was an international and interdisciplinary discussion that occupied the minds of scholars situated across Europe and North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, seeking to determine the historical origin and migration of the various Indigenous communities located across the circumpolar North.[54] Dall's particular perspective on these debates was that Inuit had migrated Northwards from the centre of the American continent (or the 'southland' as it was referred to in the poem) and had subsequently spread along the Arctic circle, crossing the Bering Strait into Siberia to the West, and crossing Smith Sound into Greenland to the East. Dall's poem was therefore making a subtle, yet important, intervention into this contentious intellectual debate and, like the depictions of the Inuit, presented Dall's interpretations as unassailable fact.

At first reading, these descriptions seem to present the reader with a detailed account of Inuit practices, and again imply that Dall sought to record substantial anthropological information using this alternative literary style. Presumably written to stave off boredom while the *Elder* was being resupplied at Port Clarence, it can perhaps be viewed in similar terms as the expeditionary songs and rhymes examined by Philpott, Leane and Behrisch above. Yet as has been shown, the inclusion of the various ethnographic details and the references to the 'Origins of the Inuit' debates also make it hugely significant for scholars interested in the production and circulation of knowledge.

Communicating anthropological information via this more accessible format, Dall's poem must be recognised as an important example of the ways in which information about the Arctic and its inhabitants was produced and circulated during this period. The use of the poetic style made Dall's assertions appear common sense and added a degree of credibility and legitimacy. In summary then, several depictions of Inuit were (re)produced within this single piece of poetry and, as will now be discussed, would become hugely influential in shaping both scholarly and popular understandings of the Arctic and its inhabitants.

The printed song

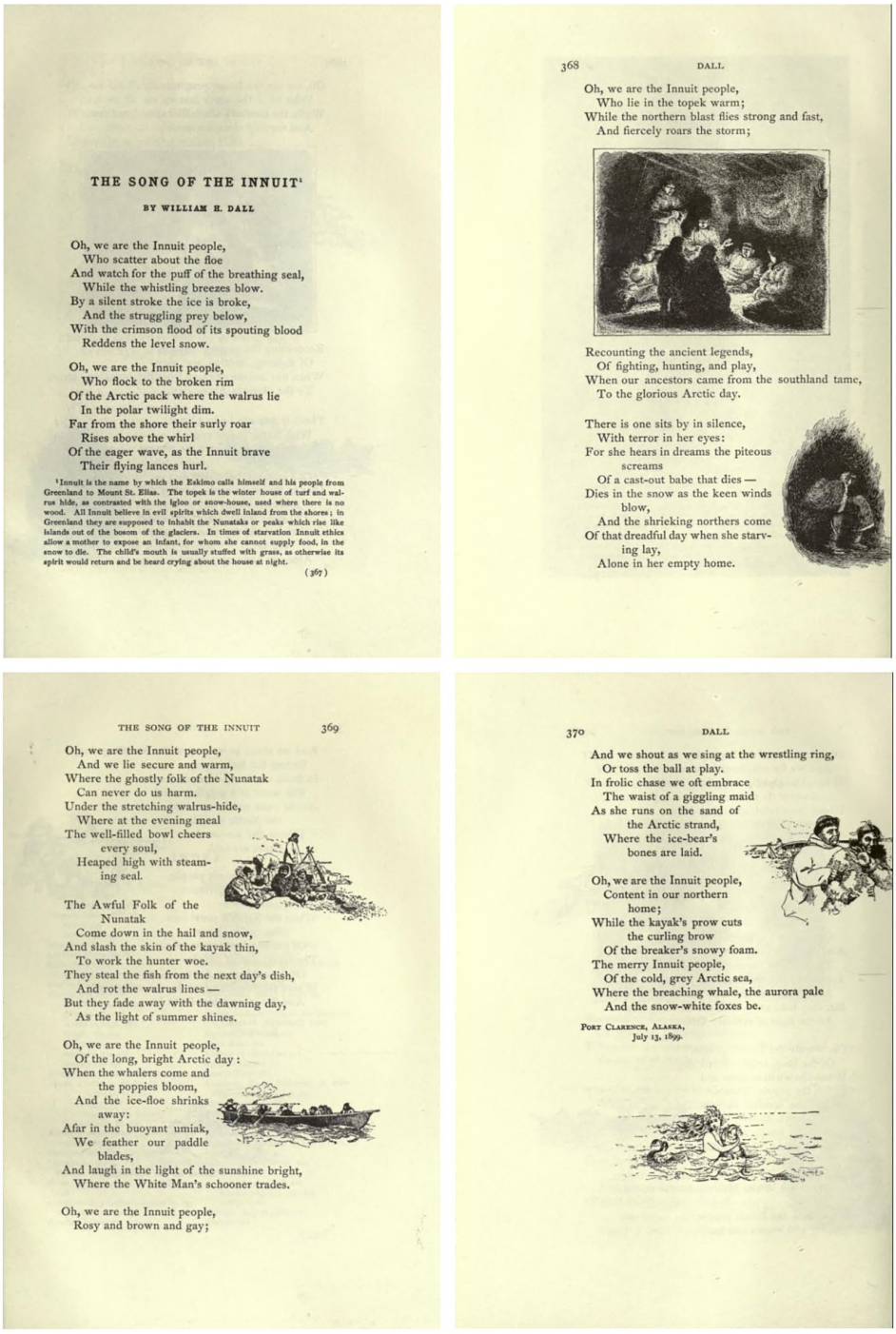
While studying Dall's poem reveals insights into his understandings of the Inuit and their customs, it is also vitally important to consider the motivations that may have laid behind its authorship. As noted above, the production of literary materials was a vital means of staving off boredom or poor mental health during expeditions in the polar regions.[55] Reading the poem aloud during the evening festivities on board the *S.S. George W. Elder* would have provided further entertainment and stimulation for the genteel expeditioners. In this context, the exchange of poems could perhaps be understood as little more than a humorous pastime intended to liven up the more monotonous sections of the Alaskan voyage. Yet, such conclusions would only partly explain the reasons behind the poem's creation. It is crucial to bear in mind that Dall's work did not remain confined to Fuertes's diary and would instead go on to be circulated to a much wider audience.

Following the completion of the expedition, the group of naturalists were keen to share the significant amount of new knowledge that had been produced. They therefore arranged to publish their findings in a series of academic reports. The resulting *Harriman Alaska Series* was a substantial thirteen-volume collection of books which presented extensive detail on the scientific work that had been carried out during the voyage. Volumes one to five of the series had originally been printed by an independent publisher, but following interventions from Harriman's wife Mary after the death of her husband, responsibility for printing the remainder of the series was transferred to the Smithsonian Institution.

Crucially, as shown in Figure 5, Dall's version of 'The Song of the Innuit' was printed in Volume II of the *Harriman Alaska Series*.[56] As editor of this volume, Dall had apparently identified an opportunity to circulate his poem to readers beyond the members of the expedition.

It is also important to note that, in the published version, Dall's words are accompanied by a series of illustrations depicting several of the customs and practices that are described within the poem. The figure printed on page 368, for example, depicts the scene mentioned in the poem whereby a group of Inuit are gathered 'under the stretching walrus-hide.' Meanwhile, Inuit paddling an *umiak* are displayed on page 369, as is a scene showing the Yupik community assembled on the Beringian shoreline. Providing visual aids to accompany the poem's ethnographic descriptions, it seems Dall once gain sought to bolster the ethnographic claims he was making and provide easily-understandable information pertaining to the Inuit and their customs.

Not all the images displayed around the poem convey such convivial depictions of Inuit life, however. The image printed further down page 368 is particularly startling and merits closer examination. Positioned next to the lines which read 'There is one sits by in silence, / With terror in her eyes: / For she hears in dreams the piteous screams / Of a cast-out babe that dies,' the image appears to depict a woman cowering in grief. This is a notably troubling section of the poem, and refers to the reported Inuit practice of infanticide, whereby young children – particularly young girls – are abandoned during periods of famine amongst the community. It is interesting to note that further information on this section of the poem is also given in a footnote. Unlike the handwritten poem scribbled in Fuertes' diary, the printed text had been supplemented with additional



THE SONG OF THE INNUIT[1]

BY WILLIAM H. DALL

Oh, we are the Innuit people,
Who scatter about the floe
And watch for the puff of the breathing seal,
While the whistling breezes blow.
By a silent stroke the ice is broke,
And the struggling prey below,
With the crimson flood of its spouting blood
Reddens the level snow.

Oh, we are the Innuit people,
Who flock to the broken rim
Of the Arctic pack where the walrus lie
In the polar twilight dim.
Far from the shore their surly roar
Rises above the whirl
Of the eager wave, as the Innuit brave
Their flying lances hurl.

[1] Innuit is the name by which the Eskimo calls himself and his people from Greenland to Mount St. Elias. The topek is the winter house of turf and walrus hide, as contrasted with the igloo or snow-house, used where there is no wood. All Innuit believe in evil spirits which dwell inland from the shores; in Greenland they are supposed to inhabit the Nunataks or peaks which rise like islands out of the bosom of the glaciers. In times of starvation Innuit ethics allow a mother to expose an infant, for whom she cannot supply food, in the snow to die. The child's mouth is usually stuffed with grass, as otherwise its spirit would return and be heard crying about the house at night.

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Oh, we are the Innuit people,
Who lie in the topek warm;
While the northern blast flies strong and fast,
And fiercely roars the storm;

Recounting the ancient legends,
Of fighting, hunting, and play,
When our ancestors came from the southland tame,
To the glorious Arctic day.

There is one sits by in silence,
With terror in her eyes:
For she hears in dreams the piteous screams
Of a cast-out babe that dies —
Dies in the snow as the keen winds blow,
And the shrieking northers come
Of that dreadful day when she starving lay,
Alone in her empty home.

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Oh, we are the Innuit people,
And we lie secure and warm,
Where the ghostly folk of the Nunatak
Can never do us harm.
Under the stretching walrus-hide,
Where at the evening meal
The well-filled bowl cheers every soul,
Heaped high with steaming seal.

The Awful Folk of the Nunatak
Come down in the hail and snow,
And slash the skin of the kayak thin,
To work the hunter woe.
They steal the fish from the next day's dish,
And rot the walrus lines —
But they fade away with the dawning day,
As the light of summer shines.

Oh, we are the Innuit people,
Of the long, bright Arctic day:
When the whalers come and the poppies bloom,
And the ice-floe shrinks away:
Afar in the buoyant umiak,
We feather our paddle blades,
And laugh in the light of the sunshine bright,
Where the White Man's schooner trades.

Oh, we are the Innuit people,
Rosy and brown and gay;

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And we shout as we sing at the wrestling ring,
Or toss the ball at play.
In frolic chase we oft embrace
The waist of a giggling maid
As she runs on the sand of the Arctic strand,
Where the ice-bear's bones are laid.

Oh, we are the Innuit people,
Content in our northern home;
While the kayak's prow cuts the curling brow
Of the breaker's snowy foam.
The merry Innuit people,
Of the cold, grey Arctic sea,
Where the breaching whale, the aurora pale
And the snow-white foxes be.

PORT CLARENCE, ALASKA,
July 13, 1899.

Figure 5. 'The Song of the Innuit' printed in *Harriman Alaska Series, Volume II: History, Geography and Resources*.[57]
Source: Dall et al. (1910).

information providing the reader with yet further ethnographic detail. Referring specifically to instances of infanticide, the footnote reads:

> In times of starvation Innuit ethics allow a mother to expose an infant, for whom she cannot supply food, in the snow to die. The child's mouth is usually stuffed with grass, as otherwise its spirit would return and be heard crying about the house at night.[58]

This is of course a highly problematic description of Inuit practices and has been questioned by many scholars. While various travellers and ethnographers, including the celebrated explorer Knud Rasmussen, did record instances of this practice taking place across the circumpolar North, as with the euthanising of the elderly mentioned above, the true prevalence of such customs has been called in to question.[59] Janet Bilson and Kyra Mancini explain that 'an accurate picture of the extent of female infanticide [amongst Inuit] and its role in the balance of power between men and women remains murky because anthropological and missionary records of the time suffered from distortion based on competing cultural values and male bias.'[60] It is important to note there is no evidence to suggest that Dall was actually witness to any of these events being described.

This section of the poem is therefore hugely revealing of the problematic assumptions that ultimately lay behind Dall's representations of the Inuit. Similar to the lecture delivered on board the ship in which he described practices of euthanasia, the way the poem broaches the topic of infanticide clearly conforms to what Jen Rose Smith has termed 'temperate normative' assumptions about Arctic Indigenous peoples.[61] These understandings, which can be traced back to early Enlightenment thinking, are based on the assumption that 'typical and logical human migrations occurred through the move out of undesirable cold climates and into preferable temperate climes, and those who "remained" in Arctic spaces were deviant and illegible'.[62] Linked to wider colonial and racist imaginaries that depicted Indigenous peoples around the world as being 'culturally inferior', or occupying a 'lower rung' on the ladder of human evolution, Dall's poem is clearly a product of these problematic geographical imaginaries.[63] The poem draws attention to practices of infanticide using the language of 'terror' and 'screams' and in doing so associates these Indigenous peoples with ideas of savagery and barbarity. This in turn demonstrates to its Euro-American readership these peoples' apparent 'deviation' from Enlightenment ideals of 'morality' and 'civility'. Furthermore, conveying this information in such an authoritative manner within the *Harriman Alaska Series*, these spurious ethnographic details are once again presented as unassailable ethnographic fact and would certainly be interpreted as such by the book's European and North American readership.

Importantly, other ethnographic details are also contained within the poem's footnote. The fact that the footnote indicator is attached to the poem's title implies that it was intended to be read before the poem itself. This in turn suggests that Dall expected the published version of poem to be read by those with little or no knowledge of Inuit customs and culture. Indeed, it seems even the word 'Innuit' might be unfamiliar to his perceived readership as the footnote begins, 'Innuit is the name by which the Eskimo [sic] calls himself and his people from Greenland to Mount St. Elias'.[64] The Indigenous dwellings are also explained in the footnote, with Dall noting, 'The topek is the winter house of turf and walrus hide, as contrasted with the igloo or snow-house, used where there is no wood.' Finally, information is also given to explain Dall's line in the poem regarding the 'awful folk of the Nunatak' noted above. As the footnote reads, 'All Innuit believe in evil spirits which dwell inland from the shores; in Greenland they are supposed to inhabit the Nunataks or peaks which rise like islands out of the bosom of the glaciers.' These points are again made with a clarity and assertiveness that seeks to further convey Dall's authority on the matter despite him having little firsthand evidence upon which to base these claims.

These supplementary points contained within this footnote are hugely significant. Their inclusion draws attention to the fact that, through the process of being published, Dall's poem had undergone a significant transformation. Printed amongst the scientific reports that constituted the *Harriman Alaska Series*, and conforming to their scholarly style, it seems that Dall no longer considered this work to be an informal ditty written to pass the time while on an expedition. Instead, the poem had now become an educational tool used to inform readers across Europe and North America as to the cultures and customs of the peoples that inhabited the circumpolar Arctic.

As a final point, it is also important to remember that it was Dall's poem alone that was printed in the *Harriman Alaska Series*. None of the other poems contained within Fuertes's journal were ever published and therefore did not circulate beyond the members of the expedition. Although there is no extant evidence to explain this decision, it is possible to infer why this was the case. As has been discussed by many authors, issues relating to scientific status and intellectual authority had a profound influence regarding which types of information could circulate, and importantly which could not.[65] Dall clearly felt that, due to his expertise on Inuit matters, the insights contained in the poem were sufficiently authoritative and thus merited wider circulation. Thus, although details about the expedition and its findings were contained in the other poems written in Fuertes's journal, the fact they were unable to circulate in the same way sheds important light on the highly regulated, and thus politicised, system of scientific knowledge production that was in place during the late 19th century.

Conclusions: From verse to violence

The analysis presented in this article seeks to contribute to ongoing scholarship that investigates the ways in which knowledges about the Arctic regions have historically been produced and circulated.[66] Importantly, recent work has drawn attention to the problematic consequences of these knowledge production processes.[67] Such work has shown that the forms of knowledge gleaned through expeditions in the Arctic were regularly used to inform and coordinate colonial interventions into the lives of the region's Indigenous peoples and this in turn led to all manner of damaging and enduring legacies.[68] From the forced relocation of Inuit communities, to the establishment of residential schools and the pervasive violence that took place within them, colonial Arctic knowledges, imbued with temperate normative assumptions, not only facilitated the implementation of these practices but also provided their intellectual justification and legitimisation.[69]

Yet examples of poetry have not yet been analysed from such critical perspectives. As the geopoetics literatures outlined above have made clear, poetry, song and verse must be recognised as crucial means through which particular geographical imaginaries came to be shaped. Dall's poem must therefore also be recognised as an important example of these damaging Arctic knowledge production processes. By studying the contexts in which the poem was created, it has been shown that the embodied encounters with Arctic peoples that took place during the Harriman Alaska Expedition were crucial in shaping lasting representations of these people in wider European and North American geographical imaginaries. And as analysis of the poem itself has revealed, such representations were not only inaccurate and erroneous but were steeped in late 19th century racialized assumptions. Whether offering spurious descriptions of euthanasia and infanticide, or discussing the perceived spiritual beliefs of Inuit, or even simply describing Inuit clothing and dwellings, Dall's poem appears to offer 'objective' ethnographic fact via this more accessible medium. Yet in reality Dall's writing acts to construct troubling racial hierarchies and invokes problematic 'temperate normative' ideas of moral deviance and savagery. The poem thus both produces and reproduces exoticized depictions of these Indigenous Arctic inhabitants, and the fact that it was included

in the *Harriman Alaska Series* not only allowed them to circulate amongst a wide range of both learned and lay audiences, but also gave them particular credence and authority

This curious and easily overlooked example of Arctic knowledge circulation therefore demonstrates that scholarly discussions and intellectual musings relating to Arctic Indigenous peoples inevitably led to the shaping of wider understandings of the region amongst lay publics and readers. As scholars continue to tease out the problematic links between explorers, travellers, scholars and imperial governance in the Arctic, the diverse forms of knowledge that were produced by such individuals must be carefully considered in order to recognise fully their utility in both facilitating, justifying and legitimising these different forms of colonial action and violence.

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