

# CRISES IN THE ARCTIC:

## Upheavals in the Memoir of Josephine Diebitsch-Peary

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**Abstract:** In *My Arctic Journey: A Year among Ice-Fields and Eskimos* (1894), Josephine Diebitsch-Peary documents her experiences during the North Greenland Expedition of 1891–92, which began ominously when her husband, the famed Arctic explorer Robert E. Peary, broke his leg aboard the *Kite* and was carried to the expedition headquarters near the mouth of McCormick Fjord. As the first white woman in the Arctic, Diebitsch-Peary faced numerous crises, torn as she was between True Womanhood ideals and desires for hunting and exploration. She navigated internal and external upheavals, depicting the Arctic landscape and native disputes, and vacillating between biased descriptions and identification with Inughuit women. Additional crises included the disappearance of mineralogist and meteorologist John M. Verhoeff and the pressures of her husband’s ambitions. Despite these challenges, she actively participated in the expedition, grappling with traditional role expectations and the demands of polar exploration. Her memoir reflects the personal, national, and international costs of a contested icescape, revealing the struggles she overcame and those she did not.

**Keywords:** Josephine Diebitsch-Peary, Robert E. Peary, Arctic exploration, *My Arctic Journal*, crises

## Introduction

The arrival of Josephine Diebitsch-Peary in the Arctic as a participant in the North Greenland Expedition of 1891–92, headed by her husband Robert E. Peary, caused consternation, if not an actual crisis, among the native inhabitants, who had never seen a white woman on their shores. She includes in her memoir of this expedition, *My Arctic Journal: A Year among Ice-fields and Eskimos* (1894) a photograph taken in 1891, which she captions “A Summer Day. Ikwa and Family.” Dressed in a long, late-nineteenth-century dress, Diebitsch-Peary towers over the native family, her face partly shadowed by the umbrella she holds to protect her white skin from the sun. Ikwa and his unnamed family look away to the left—reserved, amused, or unmoved—while Diebitsch-Peary looks down at the family with a protective smile. Her presence in the Arctic triggered bewilderment and upheaval. Upon seeing Robert Peary and his wife, Ikwa asked which of the two was a woman (Diebitsch-Peary 44). During a sledge journey into Inglefield Gulf, an old woman residing in the “snow village” at Northumberland Island scrutinized Diebitsch-Peary’s face and figure up close and exclaimed, “I have lived a great many suns, but have never seen anything like you” (Diebitsch-Peary 130). Another old woman in the settlement had heard from her son, Tawanah, “what a large koonah Peary’s koonah was, and how white her skin was, and that her hair was as long as she could stretch with her arms” (Diebitsch-Peary 134). Mrs. Peary herself faced new understandings as she traveled through uncharted terrain. Her account of a year with an Arctic expedition unveils a multifaceted narrative of personal and societal challenges as she navigates conflicting ideals of womanhood amidst the perils of exploration. Her interactions with the Arctic landscape, the native populations, and the tragedies within the expedition underscore her internal struggles and accentuate her role beyond mere support of her husband, revealing a nuanced portrayal of resilience



Figure 1. A Summer Day. Ikwa and Family.

and agency often overlooked in Arctic scholarship. Taken together, the crises she overcame, and those she did not, reveal the impatience and frustrations Mrs. Peary hid underneath her wifely domestic demeanor but could not suppress in her memoir.

## Who is Josephine Diebitsch-Peary?

Josephine Diebitsch began her life in 1863 on a Maryland farm. Both her parents had immigrated from present-day Germany; her mother came from Saxony and her father from a military career in the Prussian Army. The Civil War ended his stint as an unsuccessful farmer and the family relocated to Washington, DC, where Hermann Diebitsch found employment at the Smithsonian Museum, presumably due to his linguistic skills. Josephine graduated from Spencerian Business College as a valedictorian in 1880 and subsequently worked at the Smithsonian and at the US Department of the Interior in functions such as copyist, tallyist, and clerk. She met Robert E. Peary in 1885 and the two became engaged in 1886, which prompted her resignation from the museum. She married him on August 11, 1888, and, as Patricia Pierce Erikson notes, provided her husband with an influential social circle and home base in Washington, DC (“Josephine” 102).

Three years later, she boarded the *Kite* with her husband and his crew, despite warnings that women should not venture into such dangerous pursuits. Mrs. Peary was not the first energetic explorer's wife. Lady Jane Franklin had actively participated in the efforts to locate her missing husband, Sir John Franklin, who had headed for the Arctic in 1845 with two ships and their crews to complete the Northwest Passage. She had appealed directly to President Zachary Taylor and helped generate American interest in her husband's disappearance. Her many activities included efforts to collect relics and records from the ill-fated Franklin expedition and to control their circulation, to edit publications, and to plan a "Franklin Museum" in Lincolnshire, his birthplace (Craciun 50). But she had not herself participated in any Arctic expeditions.<sup>1</sup>

In 1893, Diebitsch-Peary again traveled to the Arctic, where she gave birth to the Pearys' first-born, Marie Ahnighito, better known as "the Snow Baby." Her adventures motivated her writing career, which began with the memoir *My Arctic Journal* in 1894, followed by *The Snow Baby* (1901) and *Children of the Arctic* (1903). After Peary returned from the Pole in 1909 and officially retired in 1911, he and Josephine spent summers with their two children, Marie and Robert Jr., on Eagle Island; during winter months, they stayed in the house they bought in 1914 in Adams Morgan, Washington, DC. After her husband's death in 1920, Josephine Diebitsch-Peary moved to Portland, Maine, where she died in 1955. She had participated in six Arctic expeditions and won a reputation as "First Lady of the Arctic" (Peary-Macmillan Arctic Museum; Erikson, "Josephine" 103).

### Where is Josephine Diebitsch-Peary?

Despite her renown, the First Lady of the Arctic makes only brief appearances in the extensive



Figure 2. Josephine Diebitsch-Peary.

literature on Robert E. Peary. In Donald B. MacMillan's *How Peary Reached the Pole: The Personal Story of His Assistant* (1934), she appears in indexes with a few page references, and in Dennis Rawlins's *Peary at the North Pole: Fact or Fiction?* (1973), she is completely absent. She makes a shadowy appearance in Robert E. Peary's *The North Pole* (1910), in which he spends considerable narrative energy on his crew and his financial and political benefactors, including Theodore Roosevelt. Mrs. Peary and the two children follow the expedition ship the *Roosevelt* as far as North Sydney, where a chartered tug waits to return them to Sydney. "With reluctant eye," Peary writes, "I watched the little tug grow smaller and smaller in the blue distance. Another farewell—and there had been so many! Brave, noble little woman!" (Peary 20). She also shows up briefly in Matthew A. Henson's memoir, *A Negro Explorer at the North Pole* (1912), in which race and hier-

archy determine their distant relationship, despite the year they both spent in Redcliffe House in 1891–92 (Henson, ch. I, XXI; Juncker 71–72). In her article in *Arctic*, Erikson writes: “[w]omen have either been absent from or powerless on the landscape of Arctic adventure” (“Josephine” 103). She calls for more attention to women such as Josephine Diebitsch-Peary, who significantly influenced economic, political, and cultural processes of Arctic exploration (“Josephine” 104).

In her short biographical account, Erikson does not allude to academic scholarship such as Lisa Bloom’s *Gender on Ice* (1993), which devotes four pages to the woman absent from the final journey to the Arctic aboard the *Roosevelt*. Bloom argues that Diebitsch-Peary “exercises a certain discursive force as part of the hero’s persona” (38), and that Peary’s marginal references to his wife situate her firmly within the domestic sphere, with its feminine responsibilities. Bloom notes that Peary never mentions her memoir, and she also ascribes considerable self-censorship to Diebitsch-Peary herself, grounded in her awareness of “femininity’s class-specific forms” (40). In *Cold Matters* (2009), Heidi Hansson focuses on Diebitsch-Peary’s departure from the heroic quest structure typical of Arctic expedition narratives and on the context of late-nineteenth-century gender anxieties. Hansson finds that Diebitsch-Peary “constructs herself as a lady” and sees herself as a civilizing and domestic presence in the Arctic (“Feminine Poles” 112). She ascribes to Diebitsch-Peary a radical intent, located in her genre revision and her presence in a men-only region, where, in Hansson’s analysis, “she remains a model of genteel femininity” (“Feminine Poles” 112).

Silke Reeploeg finds that “Josephine Diebitsch-Peary’s memory and, ultimately, her legacy as a historical figure, seems quite limited, remaining primarily attached to her husband’s value as one

of the national heroes of American polar exploration” (“Gendering” 1064). She points out that the Macmillan-Peary Arctic Museum at Bowdoin College in New Brunswick displays a photograph of Diebitsch-Peary and her adult daughter, Marie, holding the Stars and Stripes, with no reference to their own participation in Arctic expeditions (Reeploeg 1065).<sup>2</sup> Using archival sources such as photographs, objects, and manuscripts deposited at the Maine Women Writers Collection at the University of New England, Portland, Reeploeg genders Arctic historiography by challenging the masculine emphasis of polar research and practice. Her article complements the earlier work by Erikson, who stresses the significance of material objects in creating Diebitsch-Peary’s public persona, as well as the national history of Arctic exploration (“Home-making”). *My Arctic Journal* turns up in both Reeploeg’s and Erikson’s articles, but these scholars do not analyze Diebitsch-Peary’s written text about the 1891–92 stay at Redcliffe. They focus on her domesticating rather than her emancipatory efforts and pay little attention to the crises she caused or survived. In line with this scholarship, the present article reveals, with a close reading of Diebitsch-Peary’s *My Arctic Journal*, the self-censorship and the efforts it took to display the feminine virtues expected of Victorian women, and it also analyzes the memoir with an emphasis on Diebitsch-Peary’s emancipatory efforts and her experience of crises. By uncovering the fault lines of Diebitsch-Peary’s legacy through her published memoir, my analysis differs from previous readings of Mr. Peary’s wife that have tended to focus on the domestic and conformist aspects of her stay in the Arctic.

### **Disaster, Crisis, Cracks**

“John Franklin’s 1845 expedition in search of the Northwest Passage remains the worst polar disaster in history,” Adriana Craciun writes in the

first line of her introduction to *Writing Arctic Disaster* (2016). She demonstrates in her monograph the “gravitational pull” of this famous tragedy (2), which would establish a conjunction of the Arctic with disaster. Arctic exploration in a dangerous and unpredictable environment meant loss and frequent catastrophes, which attracted and stimulated explorers and fascinated their audiences, then as now. As Craciun puts it, “inhabiting a modernity in which ‘we think through disasters,’ we might recognize this Arctic disaster culture as affiliated with our own” (32). Not surprisingly, then, a mapping of Diebitsch-Peary’s journal through a lens, and a structure, of adversity and crisis stresses the relevance of her somewhat forgotten *Arctic Journal*. On the disaster-crisis-misfortune continuum, her various upheavals do not come close to Franklinian disasters, but she does go through a series of crises as OED defines them: “[o]riginally: a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent; a turning point. Now usually: a situation or period characterized by intense difficulty, insecurity, or danger, either in the public sphere or in one’s personal life; a sudden emergency situation.”<sup>3</sup> Arnold M. Howitt and Herman B. Leonard define a crisis as a situation characterized by both novelty and subjectivity. Novelty refers to the unforeseen and complex nature of crises, often involving exceptional events (4-6). Subjectivity highlights how individual perspectives, values, and interests influence the definition and experience of crises, thus contributing to the challenge of managing them effectively (5). This nuanced understanding underscores the dynamic, multifaceted nature of crises, necessitating flexible and adaptive responses. According to Merriam-Webster, which scholars such as Robert R. Ulmer, Timothy L. Sellnow, and Matthew W. Seeger employ in *Effective Crisis Communication* (2010) (8), the word “crisis” has undergone (and is a prime example of) “semantic drift” (8): “[o]riginally, crisis denoted ‘the turning point for better or worse in an

acute disease or fever.’ Now it most commonly means ‘a difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention’ (“Crisis,” Merriam-Webster). Diebitsch-Peary had every reason to maintain a smooth, even icy surface as Robert E. Peary’s wife in accompanying him on his North Greenland expedition, but, as in the Arctic icescape, cracks in the surface hide dangers underneath. The crises in Diebitsch-Peary’s record of a year in the Arctic reveal her inconsistencies, but also her frozen resolve to challenge inhibiting roles and restrictions.

### **The North Greenland Expedition of 1891–92**

On June 6, 1891, the steam-whaler *Kite* sailed from the port of New York with both Robert E. Peary and Josephine Diebitsch-Peary on board, headed for Whale Sound on the Northwest Greenland coast. A crew of five accompanied the couple: Dr. Frederick A. Cook (who would later claim to have reached the North Pole one year ahead of Peary), Langdon Gibson, Eivind Astrup, John T. Verhoeff, and Matthew A. Henson. Fifteen months later, the party returned—except for Verhoeff—to the US, aided by a relief expedition headed by Professor Angelo Heilbrun, sponsored by the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences. In an introductory note to Diebitsch-Peary’s account, the publishers list the results of “Mr. Peary’s journey.” They credit him with the demarcation of the Northern part of Greenland’s icecap, the discovery of ice-free land masses north of Greenland, and what they call the “practical demonstration of the insularity” of Greenland (Diebitsch-Peary 1). The word “practical” stands out since Peary had not yet mapped the land south of Independence Bay. This task would fall to the unfortunate Denmark Expedition (1906–08), led by Ludvig Mylius-Erichsen, who set out to explore the then-unknown coast between Cape Bismarck (now Danmarkshavn) and Cape Bridgman. The expedition lost Mylius-

Erichsen, the cartographer Niels Peter Hög-Hagen, and the Greenlandic polar explorer Jørgen Brønlund, who secured the expedition notes before he also died from cold and starvation.

### **Vouching for Mrs. Peary and True Womanhood**

Following the publishers' list of results from the 1891–92 expedition, Peary's preface to his wife's Arctic journal secures his own accomplishments and authenticates her project. He presents her initially as an anxious author, who shrinks from publicity and publication. He stresses that his wife wrote her "plain and simple narrative" only after "persistent and urgent pressure from friends," and that she doubted her experiences would generate interest outside a circle of close friends (Diebitsch-Peary 3). He also emphasizes her class (and his own) by calling her "a refined woman" (Diebitsch-Peary 3) and "a tenderly nurtured woman [who] lived for a year in safety and comfort" (5). He underlines her feminine skills and commends her for designing and supervising the details of his and Eivind Astrup's polar outfits "through the long, dark winter night, with her nimble fingers and ready woman's insight" (5). Despite his efforts to contain his wife within the ideals of bourgeois femininity, her presence in the Arctic problematizes this domestic role. Peary admits to her courage when she spends the first night ashore alone with him amidst a furious storm and the threat of a bear attack. He also credits her with calmly reloading empty firearms when a herd of walruses attacked the expedition boat, with "savagely gleaming tusks and bloodshot eyes out of the water close to the muzzles of our rifles, so that she could have touched them with her hand" (4). In both cases, he praises her for being the unselfish wife who protects her family against all odds, and he credits her with "pluck" (5). He admires her courage: "[s]he has been where no white woman has

ever been, and where many a man has hesitated to go" (3).

Ultimately, Peary cannot quite contain his wife within the tradition of True Womanhood, which Barbara Welter discusses in her seminal article on Victorian feminine ideals. She identifies four crucial virtues of respectable (bourgeois) womanhood: piety, purity, chastity, and submission (150). Submission especially marks women as feminine, as this role requirement categorizes men as "movers" and "doers," women as the "passive, submissive responders" (Welter 154). Welter stresses the importance of this pervasive ideology: "[i]f anyone, male or female, dared to tamper with the complex of virtues which made up True Womanhood, he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization, and of the Republic" (151). Accordingly, Peary scrambles at the end of his preface, written in 1893 from Falcon Harbor, Bowdoin Bay, to reinscribe his wife within ideals of nineteenth-century domesticity. He writes that his wife is once again at his side and, with his postscript, further encloses Diebitsch-Peary's words within his own. Peary ends his wife's publication with an account of his and Eivind Astrup's travel from McCormick Bay to the Northern shore of Greenland. He refers repeatedly to "the little house" in which his wife resides and takes pleasure in an unexpected birthday gift consisting of "a little box from the hands of the dear one left behind" (79). With his fondness for the term "little" and his constant contrasting of his own dangerous activities and surroundings with the home left behind, he sets up the hierarchies of nineteenth-century gender arrangements. At the end of his journey, he reunites with "the woman who had been waiting for me for three months" and rushes from the ship coming to meet him back to "the little house which had sheltered us through a year of Arctic vicissitudes" (81). Peary, as a Victorian husband, is back with his virtuous, homebound wife. Innes M. Keighren et al. add nuance to travel writing traditions by distinguishing between "modest

authors," who profess an amateur's humility in publishing their accounts (100), and "immodest authors" (107), who dispense with writerly reluctance. In Diebitsch-Peary's text, the modest author's work is delegated to Peary in his preface, while his wife constructs herself as "immodest" through silence—she dispenses with the formulaic excuses, apparently secure in her own authority and credibility. And the crises she lived through crack open the mask of cheer and support Peary prefers in his wife.

### The First Crisis

In the late afternoon of July 11, 1891, Peary broke his leg aboard the *Kite* in a dramatic accident. The expedition ship was pounding through surface ice, a passage necessitating constant reversals. A detached cake of ice hit the rudder, crowding the iron tiller against the wheelhouse, where Peary was standing after a visit to the cabin. He heard both bones between the knee and the ankle snap and was carried to his bed, where he remained until the *Kite* reached its destination at the mouth of MacCormick Fjord at the Northwest end of Inglefield Gulf. He was unloaded along with the baggage and forced to recuperate for months in the cabin the crew (mostly Matthew A. Henson) built, named Redcliffe House.<sup>4</sup> His wife writes in a November 5 entry in *My Arctic Journal*: "Mr. Peary's leg is improving steadily, and he seems more like himself. The strain has told on both of us, and I am glad it is over" (76).

Her husband's accident calls upon Diebitsch-Peary to perform her wifely duties, such as nursing and encouraging the patient, "Poor Bert," as she calls him, and "my poor sufferer" (24). Yet she seems unaccustomed, or slightly unwilling, to carry out her work. She notes on July 29 how busy she has been for three days, packing and unpacking, "besides waiting on Mr. Peary" (33).

The following day, she excuses herself for sleeping during the *Kite* departure from Redcliffe with her "not being accustomed to the duties of housekeeper and nurse" (35), an entry among others in which she stresses her own labor and exhaustion. She has not previously performed this work due to her own class privilege, but the accident nonetheless gives her a power of sorts. Mr. Peary, as she calls him throughout, remains domesticated or even feminized during his recovery. While Matthew Henson works outside on a protective wall of rocks and turf, the disabled Peary sits inside taking photographs and pressing flowers his wife has gathered for him (40). He supervises home decorations, while his wife roams the hills outside and sets up fox traps. She wins, in short, a temporary victory against a formidable enemy: the "cult of manliness," to borrow Lyle Dick's phrase ("The Men" 7). Dick explains that "this ideological strain idealized heightened notions of masculinity, which the polar explorers, themselves exclusively male, readily appropriated" ("The Men" 7). A sewing, flower-decorating Peary merged the nineteenth-century separate spheres and opened new vistas in the Arctic for his wife (Welter). Peary's domestic activities might satisfy his zest for control, but would not have thrilled his financiers back home, who also feared a growing feminization of old-stock Americans that would or could not stem with sufficient aggression the waves of new immigrant groups that arrived on their turf (Dick, "The Men" 8, 12). Michael Robinson argues that Peary's later collaboration with poet Elsa Barker—the ghostwriter of his "The Discovery of the North Pole," serialized in *Harper's Magazine* in 1910—enhanced the interest of the female readers and lecture audiences he courted ("Manliness" 109). The collaboration also exposed a gap between feminine and masculine poles, in Robinson's words "no easier to secure than their geographical counterparts" ("Manliness" 109). The women writers in Robinson's article, along with Diebitsch-Peary, all

faced restrictions as authors and travelers, but they enjoyed—or seized—the freedom to explore a broader range of ideas about the Arctic and the robust ideals of manly explorers.<sup>5</sup>

### **Wrestling the Arctic Angel**

Much of Diebitsch-Peary's memoir documents her efforts to become "the Angel in the House," the specter of Victorian respectability that haunted women writers both before and after Virginia Woolf coined the term in "Professions for Women" (1931; see also Showalter, "Killing" 207). One of Diebitsch-Peary's illustrations depicts a neat interior arrangement, "A Corner of My Room" (158), and she records in multiple instances her efforts to convert the house into a "home," not least to offer her disabled husband the comforts he needed. As Irina Overeem notes, "Mrs. Peary made perhaps a bold move to join, but then successfully carved out a more traditionally feminine role for herself" (401). Already at a dinner with an official at Godhavn, she thoroughly enjoys having the gentlemen go upstairs to inspect a geological and zoological collection there, while the ladies drink coffee in the parlor. "Were it not for the outer surroundings," she writes, "it would have been difficult to realize that we were in the distant Arctic realm, so truly homelike were the scenes of the little household, and so cheerful the little that was necessary to make living here not only comfortable, but pleasant" (14). Once Redcliffe begins to look "finished," she arranges a birthday dinner for Matthew Henson, though his version of the party is less enthusiastic (Henson 15). She records the dishes, from "mock-turtle soup" to apricot pie, plum-duff with brandy sauce, sliced peaches and coffee, as in an elegant menu, and three days later they celebrate the Pearys' three-year anniversary with equal domestic pride (40). She observes social custom by leaving directions in her absence for visitors nailed to the door at Redcliffe: "visitors will please leave their cards"

(55). In this way, as Erikson argues, Diebitsch-Peary "made the Arctic accessible to the American public by appearing to domesticate it, that is, by collapsing the distance that separated 'the home' from the diametrically opposed 'wilderness'" ("Homemaking" 269).

Diebitsch-Peary longs intensely for her husband during his expedition across the icecap and finds it hard to conform to Victorian notions of cheer and domesticity in his absence: "[o]ur routine continues unchanged, except in unimportant details, and the monotony of our life, together with certain vexations that arise, makes me at times cross and despondent" (160). Earlier, her dissatisfaction with domesticity had been brewing, as on November 25, when Peary is recovering: "[t]he days are rather unsatisfactory, although I keep busy all day sewing, mending, rearranging my room, etc. When I sum up at bedtime what I have accomplished, it is very little. Mr. Peary and the boys are busily at work on some test sledges" (82).

Depression and illness crack open the Arctic Angel's masked performances. "I was disabled by a sick-headache," she writes on October 7, when expedition members went on their first sledge trip up McCormick Bay (68). She stays at home on February 13 rather than witnessing the return of the sun from a snow hut, again due to a bad headache, and while she waits for her husband to return from the icecap, she falls prey to homesickness and gloom (111). "I am utterly powerless in my position," she writes, also because, without a husband at home, she cannot find satisfaction in wifely excellence (157). She continues: "[n]ever in my life have I felt so utterly alone and forsaken, with no possible chance of knowing how and where my dear ones are. It surely must end some time" (158–59). In late June, she begins an entry with an exclamation: "[w]hat a horrible day it has been!" (161) and then excuses herself for not being able to sit still. Her darker mood and restlessness suggest her



anxiety and dissatisfaction. In fact, Diebitsch-Peary's condition, with her headaches, fatigue, and occasional irritability, resembles the neurasthenia of Freud's late-nineteenth-century patients.

Åsa Jansson traces "disordered emotions" as a medical term into the modern "mood disorder" and depression diagnosis (50). She pays special attention to the British psychiatrist Henry Maudsley (1835–1918), whose materialist perspective emphasized the biological groundwork of mental diseases such as melancholia. As Sneha Krishnan comments, "the materiality of emotions, especially their embodiment" has become central to the histories of emotion, which have undergone a "fleshly" turn (282–83). She notes that New Materialist scholarship on embodied emotional history not only focuses on the body as a site for social inscription, but also as a site for resistance to traditional scripts (282). In Elaine Showalter's analysis, women's emotional disturbances across a broad spectrum resisted cultural notions of female propriety and domesticity. In a countermove, this "female malady" generated therapeutic practices, the rest cure among them, to bring women back into established roles (Showalter, "Killing" 210).<sup>6</sup> Because Diebitsch-Peary carried with her the ideals of white bourgeois femininity, she suffered in the Arctic, outside the realm of most women. Nevertheless, she also devised therapeutic measures of her own, such as writing and walking, as did other women writers of her time. As Showalter explains, "they struggle to keep in touch with 'taboo' but significant psychic levels of feeling and energy, and simultaneously search for covert, risk-free ways to present these feelings" ("Killing" 210). But in the Arctic, not all such efforts were risk-free.

Crystal McKinnon and Claire McLisky argue that feelings in colonial contexts function as a means of solidifying an ideological idea of difference and settler superiority (475; see also Krishnan

287). If settlers were to succeed in their endeavors, they were to appear worthy of short-term or long-term possession of the land they did not originally inhabit, a goal that also prompted their "anxiety of dispossession" (McKinnon and McLisky 475). This anxiety draws on the knowledge that Indigenous people will remain "constituted and embodied" by the land in ways that settler attachment will never match or overcome (McKinnon and McLisky 476). Accordingly, Diebitsch-Peary had to regain her composure and tranquility to legitimize her presence in the Arctic. As McKinnon and McLisky state, "coeval with settler-colonial anxiety of dispossession is the desire to move away from this emotion toward comfort and belonging" (476). In the case of Diebitsch-Peary, this desire brought her back into domestic realms, back to Redcliffe, but it also helped distance her from the Indigenous community of women around her. To maintain her racial superiority, she could not let her emotions loose, like the Inughuit women with *pibloktoq* or Arctic hysteria, a general term for various anxiety-induced illnesses caused by the strain of contact between Euro-American explorers and the Inughuit between 1890 and 1920 (Dick, "Pibloktoq" 1). According to LeMoine et al., Diebitsch-Peary was the first to report this condition among Inughuit women (and a few men) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

The mistress of a remaining igloo was making an awful noise and trying to come out of her habitation, while a man was holding her back and talking to her, but she screamed and struggled so long as we remained where she could see us. I asked Mané [Ikwa's wife] what was the nature of the trouble, and she told me that the woman was pi-blocto (mad). (Diebitsch-Peary 125)

Immediately afterwards, Diebitsch-Peary enters an igloo, which she describes as a vermin-infested, odorous site she can barely endure. She distances herself from the occupants by placing Mr. Peary between herself and the “half-naked women,” and by drawing up her knees at the edge of the bed to reduce any contact with the floor. The following day she pretends to her husband “that it was quite a lark” (125). Her mask serves to mark the boundary between herself and the Inughuit ‘other,’ and she does not throw a fit herself, since as a woman, she remains on the edge of political rights discourses, which delegated the ability to transcend bodily concerns to white males (Krishnan 287). But she still has to find an outlet for her embodied emotions.

### **Action in the Arctic: Guns and Game**

Increasingly, Diebitsch-Peary chose to trespass into masculine terrain. She called the expedition staff “the boys,” and she began to include herself in their activities: “[w]e measured some of the floes” (20), she writes on her way North, and she takes a keen interest in “the boys” climbing over the sides of the *Kite* with guns, though the bear they chase turns out to be a seal (19). She describes the seals the hunting parties bring in, one weighing twenty-six and the other, thirty-three pounds (19). She softens her observations with comments on the splendor of the sunshine and her own grey spring jacket (18–19). In another instance, again involving a bear, she balances femininity and masculinity by focusing on the beauty of the bear: “[a] very, very pretty sight he was, with black snout, black eyes, and black toes. Against the white snow and ice, he seemed to be of a cream color” (26). Once the crew has shot “the poor beast,” a process she describes in detail, she becomes one of the boys, taking a keen interest in their prey: “we estimated his weight at from eight to ten hundred pounds” (26–27).

Later, she feels no pity when a beached walrus is killed—she wishes only that she might have photographed the incident. On an outing on September 3, she makes sure her readers know that Mr. Peary has asked her to leave their camp and get warm by running across rocks and down a valley. Here she is fully armed herself, like the men who accompany her: “Dr. Cook had his rifle loaded with twelve cartridges, Ikwa had a muzzle-loader charged, and an extra load for it besides, and I had on my cartridge-belt and revolver (a 38-caliber Colt)” (49). Not only is she knowledgeable about the weapons, but she is also thrilled when the party chases a deer: “we were so excited—a case of buck-fever, I believe the hunters call it” (50). She distances herself a bit with this phrase, and she also has Cook carry her across a deep stream. She seems moved when a fawn tries to support the wounded deer in the water, and she retreats from the final shot: “[t]hen I was asked to kill it, but I could not force myself to do it” (52). But her room at Redcliffe sometimes looks like a gun shop, and in Mr. Peary’s absence, she “indulges” in target-shooting with her revolver. She begins to spend more time outdoors and to take watches at Redcliffe along with the men. Routinely, she takes her revolver on daily walks outside, where her mood is always lifted, and, now an experienced hunter, she shoots two deer for the Peary anniversary (193). Up Inglefield Gulf, she puts a bullet through the head of a narwhal. The next morning, she takes great pride in her “prize,” now “a great mottled, misshapen mass of flesh” (194). “It was a wonderful sight to me,” she concludes. “I could not gaze at it sufficiently” (194). The Arctic Angel has merged with the Great Hunter.

Her public image supports this duality. Diebitsch-Peary represents herself, gun in hand, as a phallic woman, or an early figure of female masculinity (Gardiner), while also appearing in photographs in traditional feminine attire (Reeploeg, “Gendering” 1064). Reeploeg notes that Marie Peary chose to “re-memorialize” her

mother by donating both her pistol and a silver vanity set to the Josephine Diebitsch-Peary archive, and she comments that “[b]oth were clearly deposited with a view to adding value to Josephine Diebitsch-Peary’s legacy in her dual role—as a woman that both hunts expertly and looks after her hair” (“Gendering” 1074). As a female participant in an Arctic expedition, she might also have been attempting to present herself as androgenous, a fusion of masculinity and femininity that in Virginia Woolf’s view “had the effect of neutralizing her own conflict between the desire to present a woman’s whole experience, and the fear of such revelation” (Showalter, “Killing” 208).

The notion of the Arctic as a new American frontier legitimizes Diebitsch-Peary’s efforts. At a time when Americans feared what Michael F. Robinson calls “the threat of overcivilization” due to urbanization and a diminished engagement with the natural world, even a woman’s presence in a frontier environment, with firearms, might help rejuvenate American energies (*Coldest Crucible* 122–24). As an Arctic pioneer woman, she could use a gun for her own protection and to help feed herself and her family of Arctic explorers at Redcliffe. But her activities remained masculine in this and other Inughuit settlements. Geneviève LeMoine et al. find that the native women in Northern Greenland contributed crucially to the safety and upkeep of their husbands and Euro-American men with sewing, lamp maintenance, the chewing of skins, setting traps, fishing and other activities, but hunting with guns or other tools remained a masculine pursuit (1, 3).

If Diebitsch-Peary with her gun usurped a measure of manly power, she stayed within the borders of her class. Though she drew on the image of the American frontierswoman, she remained a trophy hunter. Also motivated—or funded—by ideas of masculine softness in urbanized Amer-

ica, bourgeois male tourists in the Arctic performed a “specific trophy-hunting masculinity,” as Lena Aarekol argues (124). Not only did the trophy hunters—and Diebitsch Peary with them—enter an “already masculinized arena” simply by going to the Arctic, but they also performed a bourgeois masculinity by shooting, while leaving the groundwork—the transportation, the cleaning of tools, the dirty work involved—to others. The efforts to help her husband collect Arctic material objects also place Diebitsch-Peary in the trophy-hunting community. In Aarekol’s analysis, the goal of educating themselves and others added an element of prestige and mentorship to the wealthy trophy hunters’ masculine accomplishments.

### **Murder, Death, and Destruction**

In early July, a murder scare involving a display of guns poisons the atmosphere at Redcliffe. Henson had overheard a conversation between Kyo and Kulutingwah, both native assistants, that they were planning to do away with one of the explorers. Henson felt himself to be a possible target, due to a coffee and bread dispute, while Diebitsch-Peary disagrees. There had been enough coffee for Kyo as well, but Cook might be in danger: “[t]he doctor, more than anyone else, has reason to fear Kyo, as Kyo makes no secret of his dislike for him” (Diebitsch-Peary 166). After a conversation with Cook a few days later, Kyo admits he was scared of the doctor, and especially of his revolver, lent to him by Diebitsch-Peary. His fright had increased, she writes, when “we” had opened a window, possibly to shoot the natives from this advantageous position. “It is certain,” she continues, that “all the Eskimos are badly frightened by the display of firearms” (169). They had a plan, nonetheless, that Kyo might order the “kokoyah,” or evil spirit, to destroy the expedition vessel, and then all the white visitors would die. “I am sorry for this episode,” Diebitsch-Peary writes, “which has

brought about an unpleasantness with the natives" (169).

This toxic situation predates the later death of Ross Marvin, which Matthew Henson covers at some length in his own 1912 memoir. Professor Marvin had accompanied Peary to 86° 38' north on the 1908–09 North Pole expedition, before the Commander ordered his return to Cape Columbia. The circumstances of Marvin's death remain unclear, but Kenn Harper argues that after "Qilluttoq" had been converted to Christianity, he confessed to the missionary in Thule that he had shot Marvin, whose behavior had grown increasingly irrational ("Taissumani"). Henson goes out of his way to excuse the two Greenlanders who accompanied Marvin by claiming their innocence (Juncker 77–78). At the close of the 1891–92 expedition, Diebitsch-Peary records a death that stains her husband's success in a similar manner. Mineralogist and meteorologist John M. Verhoeff goes missing as the *Kite* is on the verge of departure, and Peary and a group of native men, experts at following a trail, take off on a search up McCormick Bay to Five-Glacier Valley, while Dr. Cook in the *Kite* sails round to Robertson Bay. The search parties return on August 24 with the sad news that Verhoeff's footprints had been traced across a glacier with numerous "wicked-looking crevasses." Diebitsch-Peary concludes: "[t]here was no doubt left that poor Verhoeff had lost his life in an effort to cross the ice-stream" (204). Peary leaves provisions for a year at Cairn Point, just in case, but the *Kite* returns to the US without the missing professor. The death of an expedition member causes doubt among his friends at home, but the Pearys feel certain that Verhoeff lost his life crossing the glacier at Robertson Bay: "[t]hese natives say that nothing has been seen or heard of him, and they hesitate to speak of him, as they never speak of their dead" (215–16). Diebitsch-Peary closes the topic by stating that both Redcliffe House and the provisions cached at Cairn Point for Verhoeff had been destroyed by

Kyoahpadu, a famous shaman. In short, murder, death and destruction linger over this early Arctic expedition, crises set off by a troubled relationship between white adventurers and native inhabitants in the Arctic.

### Crises in the Icescape

The Arctic climate and landscape trigger the crises scattered across Diebitsch-Peary's pages like ice floes, and her presence in the Arctic accounts for most of them. She inscribes her various upheavals in her icy surroundings, which she meets with emotions ranging from pleasure to horror. At times, she domesticates the harsh landscape:

The clouds hung low, and gave a soft gray background for the blue bergs which gleamed on every side of a long black strip of water—the open sea—in the far distance. The light that fell on Northumberland Island decked it in a bright yellow, while the cliffs across the bay were black in the dark shadow. (64)

She paints the Arctic on a canvas of words and thus makes more familiar the stormy, icy Arctic that often presents itself as an anti-landscape, an environment which does not nurture—or makes impossible—human survival (Nye and Elkind 11). Her own split between Angel and Hunter results in a double vision of the Arctic terrain, as in the chapter heading "Sunshine and Storm" (112). Walruses, to her part of the setting, surround her like "monsters" (58, 219). The ice causes a series of crises, as when loose ice and thick fog prevent the *Kite's* forward movement, or when she must cross a glacial stream with water above her kamik-tops and a strong current threatening her balance (172). A major storm strikes when the expedition party tries to reach Redcliffe, having first whirled past Cape Cleveland. Diebitsch-Peary devotes several pages to

the furious wind sending the fragile boat toward an ice shelf, with screaming Inughuit women, broken oars, white-faced men rowing, and everyone crouched low in the boat when possible. She aims here at “cold heroism,” which Heidi Hansson and Cathrine Norberg describe as a character-building option available in a cold climate, where defeating this challenging enemy shows strength and fortitude (67–68).

The Arctic often reflects her moods, as during the Verhoeff crisis on August 19: “[t]he day is not a promising one; dark clouds are gathering and the air seems oppressive. I trust that the search-parties will find Mr. Verhoeff today, for he must be running short of provisions at this time” (Diebitsch-Peary 72). After a fall astride a sharp ridge of ice on the ice foot, she loses consciousness, and, undiscovered, she eventually has to crawl back to Redcliffe on hands and knees. This crisis results in both physical and psychological damage: “[o]n examination it was found that I was cut and bruised all over, but the doctor declared that I was not seriously hurt; but even now I have not entirely recovered from the effects of the fall” (93). The Arctic icescape reveals her own conflicts, as she fluctuates between its aesthetic delights and its terrors. Her nature sketches intersect with discourses of imperialism and colonialism, in that seeing Arcticality as both hostile, exotic and “howling,” as well as a “semi-domestic space,” characterizes most writing on Arctic expeditions (Reeploeg, “Gendering” 1066). As she travels across the Arctic, Diebitsch-Peary uses this colonial terrain to achieve both emancipation from and compliance with the social demands of being a “lady” (Reeploeg, “Women” 184, 198).

Throughout her descriptions of the Arctic, Diebitsch-Peary adopts a colonial perspective. Literally, she shares her gaze with her bed-ridden husband, confined to his cabin aboard the *Kite*: “[w]henver anything particularly striking or beautiful appears, I am called on deck, and with

my hand-glass placed at the open transom over Mr. Peary’s head, manage to give him a faint glimpse of our surroundings” (Diebitsch-Peary 30). If Diebitsch-Peary here seems to control her husband’s perception, she shares with him the colonial gaze that Mary Louise Pratt discusses in *Imperial Eyes* (1992), for example by her tendency to see the Inghuits in swarms: “I went back for the rest, preferring this to staying with the sledge, where the natives were now swarming, and wanting to handle everything they saw” (Diebitsch-Peary 131). She compares the Arctic to Europe in order, presumably, to tame it. In passing a glacier, she finds it shaped like the Swiss Matterhorn and names it, without further ado, the little Matterhorn. “We were in an Alpine landscape,” she writes, “but the more striking features of the European ice-covered mountains were here brought out in increased intensity” (140).

Like her husband and the other members of the expedition, she never questions their right to enter the Arctic or name locations as they please. But while Diebitsch-Peary vacillates between being a tourist admiring Arctic aesthetics and a survivor in a hostile anti-landscape, her husband depicts the North as a no-place, without defining textures and signposts: “[i]n clearest weather, the solitary traveler upon this white Sahara sees but three things outside or beyond himself—the unbroken, white expanse of the snow, the unbroken blue expanse of the sky, and the sun. In cloudy weather, all three of these may disappear.” In walking on the icecap, he feels he is walking on “nothing,” and “[a] mental as well as physical strain resulted from this blindness with wide-open eyes” (Diebitsch-Peary 232). The two Pearys act like Pratt’s colonial “seeing-man,” who, from a position of dominance, describes a landscape of absence in which only his own colonial project will add a degree of civilization (Pratt 7). They subscribe to the tradition of seeing the Arctic as “an empty space for fantasies and projection” (Hansson, “Arctopias” 76). In *The*

*Coldest Crucible*, Robinson calls Arctic exploration “imperial theater” and argues that an “ersatz war” against the forbidding cold and ice created a space “to flex imperial muscle without having to do the heavy lifting required by a colonial empire” (12). Robinson acknowledges the cultural impact of the Arctic on the American imagination, even if the Peary project did not literally involve combat with hostile enemies. The Peary couple’s clashes with the land and its inhabitants, and their attempts to dominate their surroundings, nonetheless activated soft or symbolic power. An American flag planted in the ice, or the Snow Baby wrapped in an American flag—included in Robinson’s monograph (11)—demonstrated colonial intent, or a performative theatricality not without impact on domestic or international audiences and politics.

### Clashes in the Contact Zone

In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt introduces the notion of a “contact zone,” which she defines as “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (4). Given her own position of colonial power, Diebitsch-Peary’s memoir refers repeatedly to run-ins with the Greenlanders and the lack of comprehension—or empathy—she displays in her reactions. She sprays her text with derogatory terms for the Inughuits—“huskies” among the least racist—but she also fails to comprehend the reality in which they live and survive. Referencing Dea Birkett’s work on Victorian female travel, Erikson notes that colonial women who challenged gender conventions by journeying to remote areas “tended to exaggerate racial boundaries to reaffirm a safe social position for themselves” (“Homemaking” 270). Diebitsch-Peary complains repeatedly about the hygiene and the looks of Greenland natives, in

terms and accounts reeking with white superiority.

Lyle Dick notes that members of the American intellectual elite in the late-nineteenth century “were Social Darwinist *and* expansionist” (“The Men” 6). Dick focuses exclusively on Peary and the powerful group of men who backed and promoted him, but his words apply as well to Peary’s resourceful wife. Both “were convinced of the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon ‘race’ and advocates of its leading role in world affairs, for which exploration and discovery served as harbingers of American dominance” (Dick, “The Men” 6). Only when the Inughuit women perform work that benefits her husband and his staff directly does Diebitsch-Peary acknowledge their efforts, though from as much distance as the close living quarters allow. She does not recognize the vital contribution by Inughuit women’s craft to Arctic history, culture, and survival (LeMoine and Darwent 212–14, 233). She does mention the work of Mané, who arrived with her husband Ikwa and two children in the earliest days of the settlement and appears in the photograph with Diebitsch-Peary already discussed. She also feels fortunate to have brought in M’gipsu, wife of Annowka, who chews deerskins with Mané to prepare them for sewing. Though she includes herself in descriptions of accomplished work—for example, as she writes, “we have been busy working on the fur outfits” (86)—her daily entries show that only Mané and M’gipsu sew. She claims to understand the neat and rapid M’gipsu and wants her to complete the work assignment: “I hope it is not a case of new broom, and that she will wear well” (87). After comparing her skilled seamstress to a broom, she recounts the story of M’gipsu’s mother Klayah. When Diebitsch-Peary asks how many children Klayah, called “Widow,” has, M’Gipsu whispers that she had three but has had to strangle one to attract another husband. Diebitsch-Peary asks again if this is a custom, and M’Gipsu responds: “[o]h, yes, the

women are compelled to do it" (88). This explanation completes Diebitsch-Peary's account, in that she does not seem sufficiently interested or concerned to add a comment on this tragic situation.

Nonetheless, she does include native women in her publication and thus takes steps toward acknowledging their existence, though, as Reeploeg writes, her ambivalent reaction toward Inughuit women "fluctuates between appreciation and disgust" ("Women" 1070). As the year goes by, she learns the names of many Greenlanders, and their language steals into her own, as in the title of chapter XVI: "'Oomiaksoak Tigalay! The Ship Has Come!" (176). She writes unapologetically that "I have only a few white men and some uncivilized people, together with three months of darkness, to make my life pleasant," and adds that this is "not a very enviable existence, I am sure" (178). In fact, her own dissatisfaction causes her to notice the plight of native women on a few occasions: "Ikwa has beat Mané so badly that she cannot come out of her tent; her head is cut and bruised, and one eye is completely closed" (179). Yet she retreats from further speculation by seeking out the community she finds more comfortable: "[w]e know of no reason for this peculiar conduct" (179). She averts a crisis of conscience, or gender, which brews in her summary of the meeting between "them" and "us." In the chapter "Farewell to Greenland," she writes: "[h]ave these poor ignorant people, who are absolutely isolated from the rest of humanity, really benefited by their intercourse with us, or have we only opened their eyes to their destitute condition?" (207). Ultimately, this thought—and the native population—recedes, and she mentions only "the sad loss of Mr. Verhoeff" and her own good fortune (210).

### **Marital Crisis**

Though she declares herself fortunate, a major crisis lurks ahead, beyond the pages of Diebitsch-Peary's Arctic journal. In March 1899, Peary had undergone an operation for frostbite that left him with only his two little toes, though he was walking again before summer and resumed his mapping of the unknown region west of Kane Basin. In early August, his exploration ship, the *Windward*, managed to break free of the winter ice and sailed toward Etah, where a rescue ship, *Diana*, brought him news from home. In January, his wife had given birth to a second daughter, Francine, though Peary decided to stay in the Arctic and try for the North Pole. In May, he would reach a point later called Cape Wyckoff, where he would confirm that Greenland was indeed an island and then return to his quarters at Fort Conger, which he reached on June 10, 1900. But unknown to Peary, the *Windward* had returned and reached Etah on August 19 with his family aboard, a few months after Peary's return from his journey. Unable to locate Peary, the vessel was soon blocked by ice for another winter, two hundred and fifty miles south of Fort Conger, where Peary would enjoy "this cabin, this mellow light, this freedom to do as I please" (qtd. in Weems 191).

Aboard the *Windward*, Peary's wife was stuck for months. Diebitsch-Peary had not only suffered the death of the seven-month-old Francine in August of 1899, but now learned that her husband had fathered another child in her absence. A native woman and fellow passenger, Allakasingwah, revealed that her relationship with "Pearyarksuah" had resulted in her newborn son, a disclosure that shocked Mr. Peary's faithful and supportive wife. Peary had two sons with Allakasingwah, the second in 1906, when Matthew Henson's son with Akatingwah was also born (Counter 27). Both maintained the silence surrounding the sexual relations of white men with women of color in this era (Counter 48, 99). Biographer John Edward Weems applauds Mrs.

Peary's nursing of "Ally," as she called her Inughuit fellow traveler, during her serious illness and recovery over the months they spent together on the *Windward*. He also quotes a letter dated August 28, 1900, in which Diebitsch-Peary writes: "[y]ou will have been surprised, perhaps annoyed, when you hear that I came up on a ship . . . but believe me had I known how things were with you I would not have come" (Weems 190; Harper, "Heartbreaking Letter"). Peary himself remained unapologetic. Before his Arctic adventures began, he wrote in his 1885 diary:

It is asking too much of masculine human nature to expect it to remain in an Arctic climate enduring constant hardship, without one relieving feature. Feminine companionship not only causes greater contentment, but as a matter of both mental and physical health and the retention of the top notch of manhood it is a necessity. (qtd. in Weems 72).

His hegemonic masculinity does not allow concern for the Inughuit family he would eventually leave behind. Counter notes that when Peary and Henson left the Arctic forever in 1909, "[i]t was the last time the boys saw their fathers" (34-35).

In recounting how Peary's wife and mistress spent the winter together, Weems stresses Diebitsch-Peary's "invariably masked deep feeling" and her "staunchness of character" (191). He quotes another letter she writes aboard the *Windward* on January 23, 1901: "[d]on't forget to let me know about coming down and if I am to meet you anywhere. Etah, the lodge, or Fort Conger will make no difference. Oh, Bert, Bert. I want you so much" (191). This letter does not necessarily suggest masked emotions or a steadfast character, but rather Diebitsch-Peary's investment in her role as Peary's wife. Kate Manne an-

alyzes the cost of women speaking (against) patriarchal prerogatives and the benefits of silence, or denial. In seeing misogyny as a social rather than a psychological function, Manne writes: "[m]isogyny takes a girl or a woman belonging to a specific social class. . . . It then threatens hostile consequences if she violates or challenges the relevant norms and expectations as a member of a gendered class of persons. These norms include (supposed) entitlements on his part and obligations on hers" (20). If she complained about double standards, Diebitsch-Peary would then face social hostility, if not exclusion. Manne clarifies that "this work is often safeguarded by moral sanctions and internalized as 'to be done' by women. Then there's the threat of the withdrawal of social approval if these duties are not performed, and the incentive of love and gratitude if they are done willingly and gladly" (111).

In Diebitsch-Peary's case, this incentive might explain her life-long support and admiration for her husband, including her constant concerns for his health, her expedition fund-raising, her ambition on behalf of her husband, whom she nudges toward the presidency of the Explorers Club, and the home-made silk taffeta flag she wants him to plant at the North Pole, a flag that, in Erikson's words, "became an enduring monument to the assertion of Peary's conquest of the Pole" ("Homemaking" 281). Reeploeg notes that Arctic memorialization continues "strategic acts of forgetting" and "epistemologies of ignorance" by resorting to erasure and silence on topics that might stress or alienate western audiences and highlighting others ("Gendering" 1071). The missing pieces of the flag might evoke the blank spaces on the map that Peary eliminated (Erikson, "Homemaking" 280), but these blank patches might also, to contemporary audiences, suggest the silences that hide in both Peary's and Diebitsch-Peary's success stories.



## Conclusion

As her year in the Arctic comes to an end in 1892, Diebitsch-Peary sums it up: "I returned in the best of health, much stronger than when I left sixteen months before. The journey was a thoroughly enjoyable one" (210). Though at least one major crisis would wait for her at the turn of the century, she had left behind—or repressed—the crises she had gone through during her stay at Redcliffe. Not only had she managed to join her husband's North Greenland expedition as the first white woman to arrive in the Arctic, but she had also stepped up her wifely duties when Peary broke his leg. In the process, she usurped a measure of power from her incapacitated husband. She survived the demands of True Womanhood, including the required cheer and domesticity, but she also conquered the feelings of depression and imprisonment the Angel of the House must hide. As a countermeasure, she seized a gun and some of her husband's outdoor domain, which helped her overcome the fear of murder and destruction that loomed when Greenlandic assistants to the expedition felt cheated and angry. And she survived the Arctic winter, with all its icy challenges. In fact, Arctic nature helped her overcome the inevitable mood swings she could project onto her inhospitable surroundings. Diebitsch-Peary adopted the colonial perspective of her husband's expedition, though she did—somewhat reluctantly—acknowledge the work of Inughuit women such as M'gipsu, as well as the domestic abuse they endured.

This sympathy would eventually be tested with Akatingwah and her husband's infant son aboard the *Windward*, a crisis that waited ahead when Diebitsch-Peary ended her first Arctic journey. Soon afterwards, in August 1893, a pregnant Diebitsch-Peary would revisit Greenland as a member of Peary's new Arctic expedition, housed at Anniversary Lodge in Bowdoin Bay. On September 12, 1893, she gave birth to Marie Ahnighito, the Snow Baby, who became another

symbol of Arctic conquest (Erikson, "Homemaking" 271). But in her final chapter, or post-script, Diebitsch-Peary focuses on her husband's aspirations, not her own condition: "[e]verything points to the success which Mr. Peary hopes for" (220). With this wish, she performs the gendered norms that Manne describes, norms that Reeploeg also identifies in Diebitsch-Peary's diary entry about her daughter's birth: "[t]he entry indicates an acceptance of the subordinate and unspectacular nature of this event even within the hypermasculine arena of Arctic exploration. The birth itself is clearly subsumed under the bigger mission, which is focused on her husband" (Reeploeg, "Gendering" 1075). But Mrs. Peary adds a touch of ambiguity, or hesitation, to her support of Mr. Peary's superiority and success: "[w]hat the future will bring, however, no one can tell" (220). At this point in her published journal, Peary takes over. His account of the 1892 excursion across the icecap in the company of Eivind Astrup concludes his wife's memoir, now securely enclosed between his preface and his postscript.

## Notes

1. See Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible* 25–29; Craciun, *Writing Arctic Disaster* introduction and chapter I.
2. The Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum moved to the new John and Lile Gibbons Center for Arctic Studies in late spring 2023.
3. [https://www.oed.com/dictionary/crisis\\_n?tab=meaning\\_and\\_use#7813670](https://www.oed.com/dictionary/crisis_n?tab=meaning_and_use#7813670).
4. I have chosen to use Diebitsch-Peary's spelling of "Redcliffe."
5. For a full analysis of Peary's "masculine ethos" and its inspiration and endorsement by Teddy Roosevelt, see Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible* 118–32.
6. See also Showalter's *The Female Malady* (1986).

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