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## **Queering the Ocean: A Queer Ecocritical Reading of The Lost Whale by Hannah Gold**

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**Abstract:** According to Barry Commoner's first law of ecology- "Everything is connected to everything else" states that everything whether living or non-living is connected with one another. Communication takes place between the living organism and their environment, which helps us to understand that both human and non-human life are in co-evolutionary dialogue with their respective environments. There is a need to analysis the nature text and the manner in which the texts and environment are coupled, since there is variety of perspectives ranging from the biological to the symbolic and the aesthetic. According to Bennett, the vibrant materiality that circulates in the outer world and in human bodies is worthy of our attention and respect since it comprises quasi-agentic forces with propensities and trajectories that can aid or destroy us. The novel *The Lost Whale* (2022) focuses on the interconnection between the human and the non-human life. Human as an agent of material waste, pollutants, hazardous chemicals whereas the non-human as the victim for all the material reality as the earth destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption. The paper offers to bring out the material reality and the trauma of identity of things that are interconnected.

**Key Words:** Bondage, Identity, Trauma, Connectivity

### **Introduction**

Hannah Gold is a British Children's literature author writes stories with nature themes. The writer brings out the interconnection between humans and animals, environmental consciousness, the emotional bond that waves between the land and the water. The novel *The Lost Whale* is based on the trauma of a young boy Rio who misses his loved ones and often derails from the normality in search of it. Though a children's ecological narrative, it offers a profound insight into the oceanic beings and environmental crisis through the voice of the protagonist Rio.

### **ASolitude:**

The novel begins with the boy Rio, who under certain condition is sent to California to

his grandmother's house. His mother being sick couldn't take care of him sends him to recover from trauma. Rio is half American as his mother had born in California and moved to London for further studies and settled. With heavy heart he lands in California, he couldn't move freely with his grandmother as he barely knew her all these years. Ocean Bay, a small coastal town, about an hour north of LA. A boy who had lived in the hussle bussle areas of London now finds this place alarming with a strange loud noise which dislodges his intense pain trapped in his chest. He found the flat more spacious, neat and tidy which he had never seen in his home. He loved to spend his time in his mother's room. "She used to practise her violin for hours just standing there. In front of the window. You can see the grooves of her feet on the floorboards" (22) The wood felt warm under his toes. He felt a connectivity with his mother. Sometimes one has to put aside the differences to do the right thing, a decision to seek the comfort of her apple of eye.

#### **An Identity:**

Rio's grandmother Fran is a retired head master, who lived in Ocean Bay with his only companion Pirate the cat. Shows a motherly concern to him and more excited to have a visitor to her place after long years. He found his mother's sketch book that depicts the picture of grey whale. It reminded his mother's excitement whenever she spoke about the grey whales a rejuvenating joy. The White Bleak has a wild-animal look at all. It was Rio who realised with a start, a peculiarly human look. He felt a connection of string with the White Bleak. "It was a chain to his mother- one that covered time and space – and in some strange unexpected way was surprisingly comforting."(51) The sound of the ocean comforted him even drained off all his thoughts. He felt like a home a home of his mother's whale, the ocean as the companion.

#### **Queer Kinship:**

He met a girl named Marina Silver the daughter of Birch the owner of The Spyhopper, who takes whale-watching tours. Rio befriend Marina with the idea of watching the White Bleak, his mother's first love. He started to draw his attention to whales and its types and how it migrates seasonally from one part of the ocean to the other part for breeding. "It is one of the longest migration routes of nay animal on earth. And no one really knows how they even do it- how they manage to find their way and don't get lost or anything. It's like they carry a map of the ocean in their minds." (104) A whale counting database named Happy whales to check the whales and its migration. A website to track the movement of the whale and its place it is spotted is uploaded by the whale watchers.

#### **A Connectivity:**

Rio was fascinated to trace White Bleak as it had made his mother feel happy. "The one who smiled as if she had sunshine in her soul." (112) The boy felt the urge to find the White Bleak a close associate of his mother, a beautiful remainder of how happy she had once been and how happy she could be again. The happy view of fishes in the ocean like Silver, Mercurial, Pelicans, Dolphins, Bottlenose, the splash of water, the speed of boat added joy to Rio, a wondrous feeling rushing through his blood like magic. Though Rio couldn't be able to see the White Bleak he felt a curious sense of comfort. As if his mother was here with him, he could almost hear her voice whispering to him across the ocean. When Rio saw the Whale he felt it to be more familiar to him, it was the White Bleak.

**A Magical Empathy:**

Rio has been gifted with the ability to hear the sounds of the whales. During his first encounter of the White Bleak, he didn't get panic, but just felt the love of the creature. "White Bleak was right in front of him, gazing at Rio in a way that made his heart tremble. It didn't make any sense. Not logically anyway. But it was the same way Mum used to gaze at him. Full of Love" (150) The thought that a wild creature also can love human was a strange feeling for him. He felt a connection between him and the ocean. The White Bleak nudged Rio and pressed him forward towards the boat safely back to the boat as if she were taking care of him. Rio could identify his strange ability of hearing the White Bleak only after travelling to the other side of the world. A boy who had never been to the ocean happen to posses Ocean's ear like sailors.

**Ecological Urgency:**

The writer has projected how the plastic ends up the life of Whales and Dolphins. These creatures often mistake it as food and consume it. Also, the rising temperature affects the Whale's eating habits and behaviour. Hunters hunting the whales for its skin often trap them. Rio felt an immediate urge to save the ocean. When he did not find the White, he sensed a danger to it and was moving heaven and earth to reach out for it. The writer has highlighted the connection of the land and the ocean like "The Ocean wasn't just a body of water- something that linked all the land masses together. It was far more formidable than that. It breathed just like he breathed. It got angry just like he got angry. And sometimes it gets sad just like he got sad." (270) The writer has humanized the ocean and used the emotions of happiness, sad and angry, to show the correlative elements. Rio felt that ocean has been watching and caring for him like a mother and he thought that now it is his duty to fulfill the responsibility towards it. When he helped it to get away from the ghost net a trap, he felt Ocean Bay as his second home and started a new life. Rio understood Ocean as one of the best healers, and anytime that is spent with natural world would improve health and well-being. The more one loves the nature the more one works out to protect it.

**A Nature's Voice:**

Rio's emotional bond with White Bleak, is enumerated with his first encounter with it, the loss and the search for it figures out a cross-species understanding, a boundary between human and animal. The writer figuratively makes it more like human which also possess emotions and connects. The sea on the other hands is unstable, unpredictable and beyond control. Rio's immersion into the oceanic world, doesn't make him panic but he feels like home and drained off all his pain in the ocean that has comforted him. Like human the White Bleak also migrates from one place to the other, appears and disappears, watched and unwatched but its existence is real and its pain is real. The voice of the nature is expressed through the sea, the whale and Rio's dream. The writer has projected the environment as the living character giving some message to the human for mutual and affective ecology. The awareness of oneself, the inner call that strives him to find for the missing White Bleak makes him to risk his life to save it shows his bondage with the ocean. Rio a silent boy close to his mother, reclaims his place in this world after finding his connecting dots.

**Human in Nature:**

The novel tries to depict the oceanic elements in a distinctive manner with the varied

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description of the creatures, its beauty, anger, stillness, alarming or the roaring sound of the ocean. The three generation of age starting with Fran, Rio's mother and Rio who are fascinated by the ocean and feels a sense of connection that strives hard to save it. It also brings out the other part of the ocean with all the dangerous pollutants and its destructions caused by the human. A transformative of thoughts in Rio and how its is disseminated to the others, the dangers encountered and the joy of saving life is vividly described. The novel brings out the harsh reality of environmental degradation and the pollutants of the marine life. The writer calls for recognising the identity and inherent value of every living and non-living entity is crucial for fostering a sustainable future. Through empathy, and willingness to work always glorifies the nature.

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