

"Beyond the Veil":
The Antarctic Gothic Fictions of
Poe, Verne, Leahy, Lovecraft, and Campbell

by Edward Reginald O'Hare, B.A., M.Phil.

PhD

School of English
Trinity College Dublin

Supervisor: Dr. Darryl Jones

Submitted to the University of Dublin, Trinity College,

May 2018.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

I agree to deposit this thesis in the University's open access institutional repository or allow the Library to do so on my behalf, subject to Irish Copyright Legislation and Trinity College Library conditions of use and acknowledgement.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Summary

The Antarctic has frequently been a location for Gothic narratives. Ever since Captain Cook declared that it was better for mankind not to know anything about the mysterious land which lay on the other side of the frozen Southern Ocean, the human imagination has been drawn to the far south. Samuel Taylor Coleridge set the key episode of his 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798) at the South Pole, but it was some of the earliest works of Edgar Allan Poe which established Antarctica as a Gothic setting. His short story 'MS. Found in a Bottle' (1833) and novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838) were the first true Antarctic Gothic fictions. In this thesis, I argue that these works became the foundational texts of a subgenre which have depicted this geographical space as a realm of terror and wonder. Along with Poe, such authors as Jules Verne, H.P. Lovecraft, John W. Campbell, and a number of lesser known storytellers have used the Antarctic as a field of whiteness upon which to project their imaginative visions.

In the first chapter I analyze the origins of Antarctica as a Gothic territory. Tracing the early history of South Polar exploration, I will discuss how the enigma surrounding this region stimulated a range of imaginative responses from writers who tried to envisage what this distant place must be like. Using the theories of Yi-Fu Tuan, I examine the Antarctic as an example of what he terms 'alien space,' an unnatural landscape which is an embodiment of Otherness. I then proceed to give a theoretical account of Gothic literature, describing its historical development and salient characteristics as a genre. Following this, I give a definition of the Antarctic Gothic subgenre. I then conclude this section by giving an overview of the previous research in this area and a short description of how Antarctica made the transition from an abstract concept to a speculative space to a geographical reality.

The second chapter is devoted to an analysis of the central text of the Antarctic Gothic subgenre, Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*. This chapter takes a range of approaches to this complex and deliberately ambiguous novel. I begin by assessing the developments in American scientific culture and imperial attitudes which heavily influenced Poe's conception of the Antarctic. In particular, I discuss how *Arthur Gordon Pym* engages with the contemporary pseudoscientific theory of the 'hollow earth.' I then consider the Antarctic Gothic's emergence from the subgenre of Gothic sea fiction. Lastly, I analyse the

relationship between *Arthur Gordon Pym* and Poe's earlier Antarctic Gothic narrative 'MS. Found in a Bottle,' before examining the novel's mystifying closing polar episode.

Jules Verne was a great admirer of Poe's only novel, and the third chapter analyzes his own response to it, *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm* (1897). This chapter shall chart the origin of Verne's interest in the Polar Regions and assess how he first explored this theme in his earlier novel *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1866). This chapter then examines how Verne integrated the new discoveries which were being made by Antarctic explorers with his own speculative vision of this region, harkening back to Poe's text in the process. Chapter four then focuses on the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration, the period in which the exploration of the far south became a major cultural phenomenon. This chapter will give an account of both the discoveries and the disasters of this age, and consider how these were represented in Gothic fiction's like John Martin Leahy's 'In Amundsen's Tent' (1928).

H.P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936) is the subject of chapter five. Like Verne, Lovecraft was fascinated by the Antarctic and Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym* and both of these influences came together in his late novel. However, this chapter also analyses the diverse range of ideas he explores in *Mountains of Madness*. Questions of mankind's past and future, and the terror of the unknown surface, as Lovecraft's polar explorers make their way to the centre of the far southern continent. Chapter six analyses a different kind of Antarctic Gothic text, John W. Campbell's 'Who Goes There?' (1938). This is a story which concentrates more on the nature of identity than the vast vistas of the white polar wastes, but is no less terrifying. I conclude this thesis by discussing some of the more recent examples of the Antarctic Gothic, and speculate how the subgenre may develop in the future.

Acknowledgements

I would first of all like to make some attempt to thank those people who made it possible for me to write this thesis, my parents Eric and Rita O'Hare. Their incredibly generous and loving support has permitted me to do the thing that I enjoy most, and all these years later I hope they still think that it has been a worthwhile project. My sister, Anna, also encouraged me time and time again and kept me believing that I was doing something of value. I would also like to express my profoundest thanks to my girlfriend, Jennifer Harwood-Smith, who has listened to more of my rambling theories concerning Gothic literature and the South Polar Regions than anyone should ever be expected to endure. As someone who was also working on her own thesis for much of this time, she understood the nature of the process and always knew how to restore my spirits in moments of crisis. Her astonishing willingness to give up her time to help me with problems big and small has meant a very great deal.

At the School of English, Trinity College Dublin, I first and foremost wish to thank my supervisor Professor Darryl Jones. Not only was he kind enough to accept me as a PhD candidate but has tirelessly supported the work which I've done. At times when my own passion was flagging, his enthusiasm for this subject and for imaginative literature in general was always enough to leave me fully engaged again. I would also like to acknowledge my profound gratitude to Dr. Stephanie Jones of the University of Southampton for kindly agreeing to act as my external examiner, and for her immensely insightful critique of this research. Others who deserve mention are Professor Stephen Matterson, who both supervised my initial year of study and acted as my internal examiner. Dr. Paul Delaney graciously convened my confirmation meeting, and I would like to acknowledge the highly constructive feedback which both he and Prof. Matterson gave me

afterwards. Dr. Bernice Murphy suggested highly important pieces of recent criticism of which I was unaware, and allowed me to attend some of her classes when this was necessary. So did Dr. Elizabeth McCarthy, Dr. Brenda Silver, and Dr. Clare Clarke, and I am still extremely grateful to all of them for this. I would also like to thank Dr. David O'Shaughnessy, who offered reassuring advice at a pivotal stage, and Dr. Philip Coleman, who acted as chair during the final defence of my thesis. Dr. Helen Conrad O'Briain has also been a constant source of wise counsel, and I thank her greatly also.

Others who have offered help, reassurance and a listening ear time after time include Dr. Kate Roddy, Dr. Dara Downey, Dr. Daragh Greene, and Dr. Niall Gillespie. All those at the Thesis Centre, in particular Gavin Parnell, have been truly fantastic. I would also like to thank Mrs. Benny Atkinson (and her husband, Roy) for her invaluable translations, and Professor John Baker and his wife Petrena for their warm words of wisdom on many occasions. Maria McNamara cheered me up many times, as have Howard and Olga Thom and Justin and Jennifer Dawson. Gaye and Norman O'Neil, and their sons Raymond and Michael, have always been tremendously kind as well.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this study to all those who have ventured to the South Pole, both in reality and their imaginations.

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	i
Summary.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vii
List of Illustrations.....	ix
Chapter One: Introduction - <i>Terra Incognita</i>	1
Introduction	3
Section 1: The South Polar Regions and the Polar Imaginary	7
Section 2: The Antarctic as Gothic Space.....	13
Section 3: The Gothic: History and Theories.....	18
Section 4: The Antarctic Gothic: Definition of a Subgenre	24
Section 5: Antarctica in Fact and Fiction: Previous Scholarship	27
Section 6: Terra Incognita: Antarctica from Myth to Reality	32
Chapter Two: “Hurrying On to the Southward”: Edgar Allan Poe’s <i>The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket</i>	39
Introduction	41
Section 1: “A Wide Field Open and Nearly Untouched”: Arthur Gordon Pym, Jeremiah Reynolds, The United States Exploring Expedition, and the Speculative Antarctic	49
Section 2: “Oh, Horror Upon Horror!”: Arthur Gordon Pym, Maritime Romances, and Gothic Polar Voyage Narratives.	78
Section 3: “Not the Green of Earth...”: Arthur Gordon Pym, The Journal of William Reynolds, and the Discovery of the Antarctic Terra Firma	95
Section 4: “A Region of Novelty and Wonder”: Arthur Gordon Pym, ‘MS. Found in a Bottle’, and Reading Poe’s Gothic Antarctic	109
Chapter Three: “...that Magical Prison of Splendour and Glory...”: Jules Verne’s <i>The Sphinx of the Ice Realm</i>	129
Introduction	131
Section 2: “This Unknown Land, this New Ground...”: The Extreme North, the Far South, and the Folly of the Polar Quest in the Vernian Imagination	151
Section 3: “...Beyond Latitude 84° South...”: Polar Science and Verne’s Revival of the Antarctic Gothic	159
Section 4: “...Into the Realm of Things Impossible...”: Verne, Poe, the Nature of Antarctic Terror, and the Unfinished Story of Arthur Gordon Pym	171

Section 5: “This is How it Ends...or Rather Doesn’t End”: Re-Writing and Re-Mapping the Gothic Antarctic and Verne’s Nightmare of Endless Reinterpretation	182
Chapter Four: “Great God! this is an Awful Place... ”: The Heroic Age, the Quest for the Polar Interior, and the Return of the Antarctic Gothic.....	201
Introduction	203
Section 1: The Heroic Age, Edwardian Anxieties and the Changing Face of the Antarctic	208
Section 2: “Is this the South Pole? Is this the Earth, or are We in a Nightmare on Some Other Planet?”: John Martin Leahy’s ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’	230
Chapter Five: “...The White, Aeon-Dead World of the Ultimate South”: <i>At the Mountains of Madness</i> by H.P. Lovecraft.....	255
Introduction	257
Section 1: “A Hideously Amplified World of Lurking Horrors”: Curiosity, Anti-Knowledge, and the Exploration of the Unknown	265
Section 2: “...The Great Unknown Continent and its Cryptic World of Frozen Death”: Mythical Spaces, Gothic Geographies and Lovecraft’s Representation of the Antarctic Landscape	285
Section 3: “...Disordered Time and Alien Natural Law...”: Temporal Distortion, Unnatural History and the Fallen City in <i>At the Mountains of Madness</i>	309
Section 4: “That Ultimate, Nameless Thing...”: Abject Monstrosity and Liminal Terror in <i>At the Mountains of Madness</i>	329
Chapter Six: “It’s Crawling There in the Ice Right Now!”: John W. Campbell’s ‘Who Goes There?’ and the Many Forms of <i>The Thing</i>	347
Conclusion	379
Bibliography.....	393
Primary Sources	395
Secondary Sources	397

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: <i>The Ross Expedition in the Antarctic</i> by John Wilson Carmichael, 1847	8
Fig. 2: Illustration for ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’(1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, by Gustave Doré (1870)	10
Fig. 3,4: Alfred Kubin, <i>The North Pole</i> (1901) and <i>Polar Guardian</i> (1910)	28
Fig. 5: Map of the World (1569) by Gerardus Mercator	34
Fig. 6: <i>Theatrum Orbis Terrarum</i> (1570) by Abraham Ortelius	35
Fig. 7: Volcanic System, illustration for <i>Mundus Subterraneus</i> (1665)	36
Fig. 8: The System of the World, illustration for <i>Mundus Subterraneus</i> (1665)	36
Fig. 9: Portrait of Edgar Allan Poe drawn in 1837, the year the first instalments of <i>The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket</i> were published	44
Fig. 10: Artistic rendition of Symmes’ opening at the Pole	62
Fig. 11: Portrait of a native of the Sulu Archipelago, Charles Wilkes, <i>Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition</i> (1844)	75
Fig. 12: One of the ships of the United States Exploring Expedition navigating icy waters, from a drawing by Charles Wilkes	99
Fig. 13: The men of the Exploring Expedition enjoying some shore leave on an iceberg	99
Fig. 14: The Melancholic Polar Explorer: Illustration for Poe’s ‘MS. Found in a Bottle’ by Harry Clarke (1919)	115
Fig. 15: The White Figure of the Pole: Illustration for Poe’s <i>The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket</i> by A.D. McCormick (1898)	124
Fig. 16, 17: Two further artistic interpretations of the closing episode of Poe’s novel, by Jeremy Frederick (1902) and Alfred Kubin (1909)	125
Fig.18: Portrait photograph of Jules Verne by C.Nadar, 1878	134
Fig. 19: Artwork for the first instalment of Verne’s <i>The Adventures of Captain Hatteras</i> (1865)	138
Fig. 20: Édouard Riou’s artwork for the first book edition of Verne’s <i>The Adventures of Captain Hatteras</i> (1866)	138
Fig. 21: Captain Hatteras. Illustration by Riou	140

Fig. 22: Hatteras's ship off the Arctic coast	144
Fig. 23: Captain Hatteras surveys the Arctic landscape. Illustration by Riou	145
Fig. 24: The Polar Volcano	149
Fig. 25: Captain Hatteras meets his destiny	150
Fig. 26, 27: Polar Optical Illusions in Captain Hatteras	152
Fig. 28: The catatonic Captain Hatteras after reaching the Pole	157
Fig. 29: Artwork for the first book edition of Verne's <i>The Sphinx of the Ice Realm</i> (1897) by George Roux	161
Fig. 30: Verne's imaginary map of the South Polar Regions from <i>The Sphinx of the Ice Realm</i>	186
Fig. 31: The 'Halbrane' run aground on an iceberg	190
Fig. 32: The Antarctic Sphinx	194
Fig. 33: John Charles Dollman, 'A Very Gallant Gentleman', (1913)	219
Fig. 34, 35, 36, 37, 38: Examples of Polar Ephemera	221
Fig. 39: 'The Start for the Pole', <i>Punch</i> , March 1911	225
Fig. 40: 'The Tent of Death', <i>The Daily Mail</i> , 11th February 1913	229
Fig. 41: Captain Scott and the members of the Polar Party with Amundsen's tent on the Polar Plateau, 18 th January 1912	236
Fig. 42: Cover Illustration by Fortunio Matania for <i>The Sphere</i> , 24 th May 1913	242
Fig. 43: Unknown Illustrator, 'The Goal', <i>New York World</i> , May 1913	250
Fig. 44: Illustrator unknown, 'In the Cause of Science', <i>The Daily Mail</i> , 29 th May 1913	251
Fig. 45: H.P. Lovecraft photographed in the late 1920s	261
Fig. 46: Artwork for the second instalment of <i>At the Mountains of Madness</i> , <i>Astounding Stories</i> , March 1936	267
Fig. 47: Nicholas Roerich, <i>Himalayas</i> 1933	296
Fig. 48: Nicholas Roerich, <i>Himalayas</i> 1929	297
Fig. 49: Fossilized creature, photograph by Charles Walcott	315
Fig. 50, 51: Original illustrations of the Old Ones, <i>At the Mountains of Madness</i> , <i>Astounding Stories</i> , February 1936	316

Fig. 52: Original illustrations of the Antarctic City, <i>At the Mountains of Madness</i> , <i>Astounding Stories</i> , April 1936	321 321
Fig. 53: Dyer and Danforth flee from the Shoggoth. Cover art for <i>Astounding Stories</i> , February 1936	340
Fig 54: A selection of cover art for the numerous reprints of Campbell's story	353
Fig 55: McReady fights back. An original illustration for 'Who Goes There?,' <i>Astounding Science Fiction</i> , August 1938	363
Fig. 56: Unleashing the alien. Illustration for 'Who Goes There?,' <i>Astounding Science- Fiction</i> , August 1938	365
Fig. 57: Testing for the Thing. Illustration for 'Who Goes There?,' <i>Astounding Science Fiction</i> , August 1938	368
Fig. 58, 59: The Gothicised Antarctic Explorer: Cover art for the novelisation of Carpenter's film by Alan Dean Foster and unused poster art by Drew Struzan	376
Fig. 60: Drew Struzan's iconic final poster artwork for John Carpenter's <i>The Thing</i> (1982)	377

"It was a foolish thing," Godolphin said, "what I did. There was nearly a mutiny. After all, one man, trying for the Pole, in the dead of winter. They thought I was insane. Possibly I was, by that time. But I had to reach it. I had begun to think that there, at one of the only two motionless places on this gyrating world, I might have peace to solve Vheissu's riddle. Do you understand? I wanted to stand in the dead center of the carousel, if only for a moment; try to catch my bearings. And sure enough: waiting for me was my answer."

V., Thomas Pynchon, (London: Picador, 1975), p 205.

Chapter One:
Introduction - *Terra Incognita*

Introduction

Few things were more important to the Antarctic explorers than their books. Every one of the great expeditions which travelled to the far south in the nineteenth and early twentieth century brought with it a comprehensive library. When life in this enormous, desolate continent was often spent within the cramped confines of a ship or tent or trekking across featureless plains of ice, books of any kind provided explorers with a vital diversion and a precious connection to the outside world. Apsley Cherry-Garrard, for example, read Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853) while making his legendary sledging expedition from Cape Evans across the Ross Ice Shelf to retrieve a specimen of the eggs of the Emperor Penguin from the rookeries of Cape Crozier.¹ When their supply of printed matter ran low, these explorers produced their own. The men of Robert Falcon Scott's 'Discovery' and 'Terra Nova' expeditions published Antarctica's first newspaper, *The South Polar Times*, while those who accompanied Ernest Shackleton on the 'Nimrod' expedition chronicled its progress in the pages of the *Antarctic Petrel*. Many explorers found that Antarctica reawakened their love of literature,² while others, such as the indomitable Australian geologist Douglas Mawson, were even inspired to write fantastical stories about this realm of all-encompassing whiteness.³

¹ See Apsley Cherry-Garrard, *The Worst Journey in the World* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p 203. Cherry-Garrard also explains that "poetry was useful, because it gave one something to learn by heart and repeat during the blank hours of the daily march, when the idle mind is all too apt to think of food in times of hunger, or possibly of purely imaginary grievances, which may become distorted into real foundations of discord under the abnormal strain of living for months in the unrelieved company of three other men," p 203.

² Ernest Shackleton, in particular, found himself constantly quoting from literary sources while exploring the far south. His polar memoirs *The Heart of the Antarctic* and *South* contain numerous literary allusions. See Beau Riffenburgh ed. Ernest Shackleton *The Heart of the Antarctic and South* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2007). Paul Simpson-Housley has written that "the biographies of Antarctic explorers are replete with citations from poetry of quality. Some explorers themselves felt the creative spirit, and were inspired to compose odes, poems, and prose to portray their experiences of ice and loneliness, two dominant features of their lived world." See Paul Simpson-Housley, *Antarctica: Exploration, Perception and Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 1992), p 99.

³ Instead of writing a scientific piece for the *Aurora Australis* (1908), the first book ever manufactured entirely in Antarctica, Mawson contributed a polar lost world tale entitled 'Bathybia', which Bill Manhire has described as "a piece which might have come straight out of Verne or Conan Doyle." See Bill Manhire, *The Wide White Page: Writers Imagine Antarctica* (Victoria: Victoria University Press, 2004), p 16.

Considering that many of those who participated in what has become known as the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration⁴ were either sober-minded scientists or hardened sailors, it is remarkable that works of literature made up as much as a third of the contents of their libraries.⁵ Like the explorers themselves, most of these books made it back safely from the far south but some were never to return. Such was the case with two volumes found inside Granite House,⁶ a shelter on the bleak coast of Victoria Land originally built by the members of the British Antarctic Expedition in November 1911. Once the property of Thomas Griffith Taylor and Frank Debenham, the expedition's Senior Geologist and his assistant, they were apparently left behind when the Second Western Party set out to survey the surrounding area. Forty-eight years later, the books were discovered, perfectly preserved, by a team of Americans. When the identities of their former owners were established, their titles must have seemed surprising. They were *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* by Edgar Allan Poe and *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm* by Jules Verne.⁷

Following their far southern exploits, both Griffith Taylor and Debenham went on to have immensely distinguished careers; the former was elected the first President of the Institute of Australian Geographers, while the latter became the inaugural director of the Scott Polar Research Institute. The fact that these two brilliant minds had passed the time

⁴ The Heroic Age is generally regarded as having begun with the Belgian Antarctic Expedition of 1897, commanded by Adrien de Gerlache. However, there is disagreement as to when it concluded. Some historians, such as Max Jones in *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), argue that the deaths of Scott and four other members of his last expedition in March 1912 marked the climax of this period of exploration, while others, such as David Day in *Antarctica: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Edward J. Larson in *An Empire of Ice: Scott, Shackleton and the Heroic Age of Antarctic Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), maintain that it continued for another decade and ended only with the death of Ernest Shackleton during the initial stages of the Shackleton-Rowett Expedition in January 1922.

⁵ Elizabeth Leane has given this estimate after analyzing the contents lists of the various expedition libraries, see *Antarctica in Fiction: Imaginative Narratives of the Far South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p 112.

⁶ It can be deduced that at least one member of the Second Western Party was an aficionado of Verne. 'Granite House' was the name of the cliff-top sanctuary constructed by the castaway balloonists in his novel *The Mysterious Island* (1874).

⁷ Sara Wheeler relates how these books were discovered in *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (London: Vintage, 1997), p133.

inside Granite House not in the perusal of geographical charts but engrossed in the polar fantasies of a pair of authors who died without ever having seen Antarctica prompts some tantalizing questions: What did they hope to gain from reading these novels, whose depictions of the South Polar Regions must by this time have seemed absurdly inaccurate? How may these fictions have influenced their visions of the Antarctic, or their perceptions of what they were doing there? Did they perhaps believe that these works could offer an alternative mode of insight into the nature of this vast and mostly unknown domain?

The presence of Poe and Verne's novels in Granite House in November 1911 doubtlessly suggests that Griffith Taylor and Debenham were curious to know what these authors imagined was at the South Pole, which Roald Amundsen would not claim until the following month.⁸ This was not the first time that explorers had yearned to see those remote areas of the Antarctic which thus far had only been described in fiction. As I shall discuss at a later point in this introduction, even before it was known for certain that there was land at the very base of the globe a diverse collection of writers and thinkers had formulated their own elaborate conceptions of what existed there. Moreover, the quest to reach Antarctica proved so monumentally difficult, and its progress was so protracted, that the cultural influence of these fantasised projections persisted even after the first expeditions had finally arrived on its shores. For this reason, Bill Manhire has written that Antarctica is somewhere which has been "devised by the human imagination"⁹ as much as it has been discovered by science. Consequently, this thesis shall consider the history of far southern exploration as a site of interplay between factual and fictional narratives which are not separable but mutually constitutive.

Since the Antarctic constituted a *Terra Incognita* beyond man's intellectual and physical grasp, it is understandable why it became a source of fascination firstly for the

⁸ Amundsen arrived at the Geographic South Pole and raised the Norwegian flag there on December 14th, 1911. He named the camp his 'Polheim', or 'Home at the Pole'.

⁹ *The Wide White Page*, p 10.

Romantics and later, and much more significantly, for some of the most celebrated Gothic authors. Indeed, even after the far south began to be opened up by explorers, their spectacular accounts of its enigmatic frozen landscapes only heightened the Gothic imagination's obsession with it. Therefore, what I will seek to analyze in this thesis is the rich interaction between this mode of literature and the development of mankind's knowledge of the South Polar Regions. By focusing on a specific set of texts written from 1838 until the present day, I shall examine how Gothic fiction has not only responded to some of the major episodes of Antarctic exploration history but also used the chronicles of these endeavours to create works which have enlarged its scope as a literary form.

Section 1: The South Polar Regions and the Polar Imaginary

Even though it had been a source of speculation since antiquity, the process by which Antarctica became a subject matter for Gothic fiction can be said to have begun as a result of Captain James Cook's second voyage of circumnavigation in 1775. Having made history by crossing the Antarctic Circle, Cook then searched for the hypothetical southern continent for more than a year. Although he found no indication of a landmass and was repelled by an unbroken icefield which stretched to the horizon, Cook anticipated that this would not deter others from trying to push further into the Southern Ocean. Nevertheless, he wrote that "Whoever has resolution and perseverance to find [a continent] beyond where I have been, I shall not envy him the honour of the discovery; but I will be bold to say that the world will not be benefited by it".¹⁰ The remorseless onslaught of fog, blizzards and freezing temperatures he had encountered was nothing compared to the "enexpressable horrid aspect"¹¹ of this distant region. If a continent did exist there, Cook surmised that it must be "a Country doomed by nature never once to feel the warmth of the Sun's rays, but to lie for ever buried under everlasting snow and ice".¹²

Cook held that it was futile to exceed his record for furthest south (71° 10'), and was convinced that it would remain the *Ne plus ultra*, or limit of all geographical discovery. His prediction proved accurate until 1823, when Captain James Weddell sailed as far as 74° 15', where he experienced temperate conditions, an abundance of marine life, and declared that "NOT A PARTICLE OF ICE OF ANY DESCRIPTION WAS TO BE SEEN".¹³ A further sixteen years passed before the British Admiralty despatched James Clark Ross to

¹⁰ Captain James Cook, Ernest Rhys and Simon Marshall ed. *The Voyages of Captain Cook* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1999), p 221.

¹¹ Captain James Cook, Philip Edwards ed. *The Journals* (London: Penguin, 1999), p 412.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Captain James Weddell, *A Voyage towards the South Pole* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), p 36.

investigate Weddell's claims. After a four year voyage of scientific exploration, he confirmed that the southern continent was no myth but an extraordinary reality. Although his attempts to make a landing were thwarted, Ross successfully charted an extensive segment of the far southern coastline which included "an extraordinary barrier of ice, probably more than a thousand feet in thickness".¹⁴ This was the Great Ice Barrier (later renamed the Ross Ice Shelf), which became the point of entry for the Antarctic expeditions of the following century. On his return to Britain, Ross presented a meticulous account of an immense and mountainous land dominated by an uncanny whiteness of which it was "very difficult to give expression either by pencil or description".¹⁵ Indeed, this frozen country was a place unlike any human beings had explored before. It was an alien world, only here on Earth. [Fig.1]



Fig. 1: *The Ross Expedition in the Antarctic* by John Wilson Carmichael, 1847

¹⁴ Captain James Clark Ross, *A Voyage of Discovery and Research in the Southern and Antarctic Regions During the Years 1839-43* (London: John Murray, 1847), p 228.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p 257.

The fertile period of conjecture between Cook's second voyage and Clark Ross's complete revolutionising of the far southern frontier saw the advent of Antarctic Gothic literature. Captivated by Cook's haunting description of a mournful kingdom of ice at the world's end, Samuel Taylor Coleridge made a journey to the South Pole the key incident of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798), one of the most widely-read compositions of the Romantic era [Fig. 2]. Meanwhile, in an 1836 issue of the Virginia periodical *The Southern Literary Messenger* a young critic bemoaned the fact that the world was losing the last of its mystery. In an article commemorating Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Edgar Allan Poe wrote that there was "positively not a square inch of new ground"¹⁶ for a modern day adventurer to discover, since even the Southern Ocean had now been "incontinently ransacked".¹⁷ And yet, only a month before this Poe had made his first contribution to the rapidly advancing discourse of polar exploration.

¹⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, Article on *The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, *The Southern Literary Messenger*, January 1836, in G.R. Thompson ed. *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews* (New York: Library of America, 1984), p 201.

¹⁷ Ibid.



Fig. 2: Illustration for ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’(1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, by Gustave Doré (1870)

Reviewing an article on Sir John Ross’s *Narrative of a Second Voyage in search of a North-West Passage* (1835), Poe disputed the view that this expedition had located the position of the North Magnetic Pole. Instead, he explained that “the Magnetic Pole is *movable*, and place it where we will, we shall not find it in the same place tomorrow”.¹⁸ Poe also berated this work on the grounds that it overlooked “the fact that the Magnetic

¹⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, Review of *The Edinburgh Review* No. CXXIV July 1835, *The Southern Literary Messenger*, January 1836, in J.A. Harrison ed. *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Vol. VIII: *Literary Criticism* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1902), p 87.

Pole is not coincident with the *Pole of Maximum Cold*”,¹⁹ something which such illustrious figures as William Scoresby, Sir William Edward Parry and Sir John Franklin had conclusively demonstrated. From this review, it is evident that Poe had already been taking a keen interest in matters relating to the Arctic. Therefore, when he eventually learned of Weddell’s discovery of mild temperatures and open seas in high southern latitudes, it is clear why Poe revised his opinion that the Antarctic was all but exhausted as a place for further exploration. On the contrary, in his mind it now became a space of infinite possibility.

Brief though they may be, Poe’s early observations on the extreme north and far south are pivotal for they mark the beginning of his engagement with what Darryl Jones has termed the Polar Imaginary, the parallel history of these regions as “*an imaginative space*”.²⁰ As the following chapter will assess, Poe’s elaboration of this theme would continue in the form of short stories, a series of lengthy articles on South Seas exploration, and culminate with his only published novel, *Arthur Gordon Pym*, a text which confounded its original reviewers and whose many perplexing mysteries have subsequently inspired an extraordinarily varied collection of critical interpretations.²¹ The foundational works of the Antarctic Gothic, they have shaped all of the fictions examined in this thesis to varying extents. Indeed, Stephen J. Pyne is only partly exaggerating when he claims that completing Pym’s unfinished story has “offered the kind of a challenge to writers that Fermat’s Last Theorem presented to mathematicians”.²² Nonetheless, he is entirely correct

¹⁹ Ibid, p 88.

²⁰ Darryl Jones, ‘Ultima Thule: *Arthur Gordon Pym*, the Polar Imaginary, and the Hollow Earth’, in *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, Spring 2010, Vol. XI, No. 1, p 55.

²¹ For comprehensive selections of critical responses to *Arthur Gordon Pym* see Ian M. Walker ed. *Edgar Allan Poe: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986) and Graham Clarke ed. *Edgar Allan Poe: Critical Assessments*, Vols. 1, 2 (East Sussex: Helm Information, 1991). The scholarly debates concerning novel’s background, composition, initial failure and its eventual resurrection as one of the pivotal works of nineteenth century American Gothic literature have been thoroughly discussed by Ronald C. Harvey in *The Critical History of Edgar Allan Poe’s The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym: “A Dialogue with Unreason”* (New York: Garland, 1998).

²² Stephen J. Pyne, *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003), p 165.

in stating that together Poe's texts have not just been the model for the fantastical far southern tales of other authors but also transformed the Antarctic into "a symbol of a Gothic geography beyond human exploration".²³

Coleridge's poem had conjured up an Antarctic zone of endless towering icebergs which closely resembled Cook's abysmal *Ne plus ultra*, but Poe became the first in a sequence of authors who, in Francis Spufford's words, felt it necessary "for there to be *something* at the poles, some climactic *thing* commensurate with the finality of the poles, rather than an expanse of ice significant only by geographical convention".²⁴ However, even after the South Pole was conquered the Antarctic's absolute Otherness continued to be revealed. As Elizabeth Leane has written, "the continent's qualifications as a gothic setting are manifold".²⁵ not only is it the most isolated region on the planet,²⁶ its uniquely harsh conditions (temperatures of -100 degrees Fahrenheit are not unusual in the wintertime) mean that it has never had an indigenous population and only a relatively limited ecosystem has flourished there. The greatest desert on Earth, it spends half of the calendar year in total darkness and the other half in continual daylight. Even now, nearly 180 years after the first confirmed sighting of its coastline and almost 120 years since the first documented landing on its shores, it remains a desolate wilderness which humanity can never fully domesticate.²⁷ Scott, perhaps, came closest of all to expressing its sublime horror, when he wrote in his last journal, "Great God! this is an awful place".²⁸

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p 76.

²⁵ *Antarctica in Fiction*, p 59.

²⁶ In light of the treacherous seas surrounding the continent and its hazardous coastline, it has been stated that it is less difficult to reach the moon than it is to make a successful landing on Antarctica. Indeed, because of the similar nature of the extreme environmental problems involved, NASA's Apollo programme was modelled upon the two most recent American Antarctic expeditions, Operation Highjump (1946-47) and Operation Deep Freeze (1955-56). See Philip Smith and Rodney W. Johnson, 'From the South Pole to the Moon', *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 24, No. 10 (Chicago: Educational Foundation for Nuclear Science, 1965), p 35-37.

²⁷ Two recent memoirs which detail the severe challenges that Antarctica still presents for the modern polar traveller are Gavin Francis, *Empire Antarctica: Ice, Silence & Emperor Penguins* (London: Chatto and

Section 2: The Antarctic as Gothic Space

In assessing the qualities which make the South Polar Regions a Gothic space, the views of Yi-Fu Tuan are especially insightful. Unlike almost every other kind of geographical territory, he writes that “the great polar regions of the earth did not lend themselves to dreams of potential fertility or to the illusion of small size conquerable by man”.²⁹ Instead, they represent “a crystalline and nonhuman place that challenges normal values”.³⁰ Since they are virtually barren and intrinsically hostile, Tuan states that when we consider them one question naturally takes precedence: “[w]hy would anyone want to go there?”³¹ In relation to the Arctic, the myth of the Open Polar Sea and the economic drive to “find a way to the land of spices over the ceiling of the world”³² were the reasons why many nations sent expeditions north. As there was no equivalent impetus to venture south, Tuan observes that Antarctic explorers were motivated by a range of different factors, including “the desire for adventure, to set a record, acquire sufficient income to be independent, test the limit of human endurance, know oneself uncozened by civilization, [and to] win glory for self and country”.³³

The official rationale for most Antarctic expeditions was scientific discovery. In Tuan’s words, it followed that “[s]o long as there were places unrecorded by man, so long must scientists continue to risk their lives for the sake of gaining new knowledge”.³⁴ At the same time, he believes that another factor was responsible for man’s persistent efforts to

Windus, 2012) and Ranulph Fiennes, *Cold: Extreme Adventures at the Lowest Temperatures on Earth* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2013)

²⁸ Robert Falcon Scott, Max Jones ed. *Journals: Captain Scott’s Last Expedition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p 376.

²⁹ Yi-Fu Tuan, ‘Desert and Ice: Ambivalent Aesthetics’ in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell ed. *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p 142.

³⁰ Ibid, p 145.

³¹ Ibid, p 147.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

reach the far south. Underlying and even outweighing the traditional reasons for going there, he argues that Antarctic explorers were compelled by “the desire to plunge into an alien space”.³⁵ According to Tuan’s theory, most geographical environments are made up of three concentric zones: at the centre is the ‘homeplace’ which provides shelter and protection; around the ‘homeplace’ is the ‘home space’, which constitutes the familiar aesthetic field “that stretches beyond one’s immediate circumambient world”;³⁶ finally, there is the fearful, unknown realm of ‘alien space’. Tuan contends that what separates the Polar Regions from everywhere else on Earth (with the possible exception of some of its largest deserts) is the fact that they are places in which the ‘home space’ does not exist. They are environments so vast and overridingly alien that this zone of mediation cannot be constructed. Faced with nothing but “the sublime ‘Otherness’”³⁷ of nature itself, Tuan states those who penetrate these regions experience a “loss of self”³⁸ which is equivalent to their actual annihilation.

Shackleton was one of the first to articulate this intense desire for alien space in the opening pages of *The Heart of the Antarctic* (1909). He explains that “[m]en go out into the void spaces of the world for various reasons. Some are actuated simply by a love of adventure, some have the keen thirst for scientific knowledge, and others again are drawn away from the trodden paths by the ‘lure of little voices’, the mysterious fascination with the unknown”.³⁹ Having been part of Scott’s ‘Discovery’ expedition, Shackleton was consumed by the urge “to see more of the vast continent that lies amidst the Antarctic snows and glaciers”.⁴⁰ He goes on to state that “the stark polar lands grip the hearts of the men who have lived on them in a manner that can hardly be understood by the people who

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, p 140.

³⁷ Ibid, p 154.

³⁸ Ibid, p 155.

³⁹ Ernest Shackleton, *The Heart of the Antarctic and South*, p 9.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

have never got outside the pale of civilization”.⁴¹ What explorers like Shackleton convey, according to Tuan, is the idea that “life is more likely to yield its deepest meaning surrounded by the inhuman silence, beauty, and terror of ice”.⁴² Only in a realm of such absolute desolation, where “[t]ime itself seems frozen”,⁴³ can a human being satisfy what he describes as “the longing to be taken out of oneself and one’s habitual world into something vast, overpowering and indifferent”.⁴⁴

One of my arguments in this thesis is that Antarctic Gothic fiction represented the strange, overmastering allure of this region even before it found expression in exploration accounts. From Pym’s perverse quest to reach the South Pole to Lovecraft’s protagonist’s obsession with a mountain range like none ever seen before, the Antarctic’s irrational but irresistible hold over the human mind shall be a recurrent theme in the following chapters. More than half a century before the dying Scott explained to the world why he and his companions had willingly sacrificed themselves to uncover more of a continent which was worthless in conventional terms, Poe and Verne had already depicted the inexorable influence of the Earth’s ice-bound wastelands upon the psyche. As we shall see, in their Gothic works the polar explorer emerges as a figure “half in love with death”,⁴⁵ the characteristic which Tuan suggests was also the dominant trait of their real-life counterparts.

If Antarctica’s massiveness,⁴⁶ remoteness and frigid climate were not sufficient to make it a forbidding Gothic location, from the earliest exploration accounts it became apparent that this was a place where both the body and mind were subjected to punishing trials. The first expeditions to come within sight of the far southern coastline found their

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts*, p 148.

⁴³ Ibid, p 151.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p 155.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ It covers an area approximately the size of the continental United States and Mexico combined.

attempts to chart it hampered not just by hazardous sailing conditions but by the deceptive nature of experience in these latitudes. Things were much worse for those who later ventured onto the continental surface: their senses of depth, scale and perspective became grotesquely distorted; they were plagued by disorientating mirages and nightmarish optical illusions; they found their very confidence in empirical reality sorely undermined after being repeatedly led astray by their own senses. In his study of Antarctic aesthetics, Paul Simpson-Housley has written that when an “environment itself is strange to the perceiver”⁴⁷ they are more likely to be misled by what they see. Since it is by far the most unusual place on the globe, Simpson-Housley notes that the history of Antarctic exploration contains innumerable instances of what he calls “environmental misinterpretation”.⁴⁸

In light of its sheer inaccessibility and its capacity to deceive the rational mind, it can easily be comprehended why Gothic authors came to depict the Antarctic as a region of wonder and terror withholding a profoundly important secret. In their imaginations, a place which so defiantly resisted mankind’s most determined efforts to explore it had to conceal some variety of ultimate, transcendental knowledge. As I will show in the following chapters, this notion plays a part in each of the Gothic works under discussion. In Spufford’s words, these texts portray the Antarctic landscape as “a terrain quivering with some not-quite-sayable message”,⁴⁹ an encrypted geography inscribed with a cosmic riddle which it is the polar explorer’s task to decipher. In addition, these authors envisage the far south as the very boundary of phenomenal reality, not merely the edge of the known world but possibly even the limit of all that can be known. For this reason, I have taken the

⁴⁷ Paul Simpson-Housley, *Antarctica: Exploration, Perception, Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 1992), p xvi.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p xvii.

⁴⁹ Francis Spufford ed., *To the Ends of the Earth: An Anthology of the Finest Writing on the Arctic and Antarctic, Volume Two: The Antarctic* (London: Granta Books, 2007), p 155.

phrase “beyond the veil”⁵⁰ from *Arthur Gordon Pym* as my title, since it most appositely encapsulates the Gothic conception of the Antarctic as what Frederick S. Frank and Diane Long Hoeveler have termed “the curtain of the unknown”,⁵¹ a metaphysical realm suffused with mystery and bordering upon eternity.

However, as much as this thesis is primarily concerned with the Antarctic’s representation as a Gothic space in various novels and short stories, its objectives extend beyond a mere systematic textual analysis. Indeed, in the subsequent chapters I shall seek to accomplish the following aims: prove that these Antarctic Gothic fictions are not just a group of essentially unrelated works which coincidentally share a far southern setting but an actual subgenre of Gothic literature; argue for the existence of this subgenre by identifying key themes, imagery and ideas which recur throughout this distinct body of texts; finally, I shall investigate the sometimes complex interrelationship between this subgenre and Antarctic exploration by examining these works from a range of perspectives and by situating them within their historical contexts.

⁵⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* in Patrick F. Quinn ed., *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales* (New York: Library of America, 1984) p 1179.

⁵¹ Frederick S. Frank and Diane Long Hoeveler Introduction to Frederick S. Frank and Diane Long Hoeveler ed. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2010), p 23.

Section 3: The Gothic: History and Theories

In order to demonstrate that Antarctic Gothic fiction constitutes a legitimate Gothic subgenre, an exact definition of it is called for. Before I can provide such a definition, it is first of all necessary to pose a question: what constitutes Gothic literature? The notorious difficulty of this undertaking is compounded by the fact that the very word ‘Gothic’ has signified many different things over time. Nick Groom, a critic who has recently attempted to establish its various meanings, writes that the term had a “rich semantic history”⁵² well before it became identified with a particular form of literature, and was used to denote everything from an ancient Germanic people to the predominant architectural style of the medieval period. Roger Luckhurst states that the Gothic’s association with the barbarity of the past meant that it originally came to symbolise “the opposite of Western Europe, of civilization, of reason and order”.⁵³ Critical studies invariably agree that the first Gothic novel was Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), a work whose success led the way for those of Matthew Lewis, Ann Radcliffe, William Beckford, Charles Maturin and a plethora of even more sensational imitations.

David Punter has observed that these foundational Gothic novels were marked by “an emphasis on portraying the terrifying, a common insistence on archaic settings, a prominent use of the supernatural, the presence of highly stereotyped characters and the attempt to deploy and perfect techniques of literary suspense”.⁵⁴ Although the plot structures it employed were frequently convoluted, Gothic fiction’s innovative approach to the evocation of atmosphere and its deliberate preoccupation with the unnatural, the fantastic and the mysterious remain the genre’s most readily identifiable features. As

⁵² Nick Groom, *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. xiv.

⁵³ Roger Luckhurst ed., *Introduction to Late Victorian Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. x.

⁵⁴ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Volume I: The Gothic Tradition* (London: Longmans, 1996), p. 1.

extravagant and transgressive works which were “often genuinely horrific and full of terrors”,⁵⁵ Adam Roberts has written that these early Gothic texts became “one of the major vehicles by which Romanticism poured out to dominate literature”.⁵⁶ Although Roberts argues that it emerged more as a result of “nostalgia for a medieval past than an outright hostility to the values of Enlightenment neoclassicism”,⁵⁷ Gothic fiction nonetheless came to be perceived as an outlet for modern man’s primitive fears and morbid fascinations.

However, there has rarely been any consensus concerning the actual classification of Gothic literature. In relation to the first phase of Gothic novels, Punter has noted that “it appears at first glance to be a relatively homogenous body of writing, linked stylistically, thematically and ideologically, but on closer inspection the illusions falls away, revealing a very disparate collection of works”.⁵⁸ Consequently, he posits that it is perhaps more accurate to define Gothic literature as “a wide-ranging and persistent tendency within fiction as a whole”,⁵⁹ rather than “a historically delimited genre”.⁶⁰ Luckhurst also argues that the history of the Gothic reveals “how a genre is less a set of fixed narratives and images and more a constantly modulating mode – almost a way of thinking”.⁶¹ He notes that the Gothic “appeared to split between relatively distinct strands early in its existence”,⁶² evolving into separate types of fiction and “producing a continuum from the subtle terrors of the *psychological* Gothic to the body horrors of the *physiological* Gothic”.⁶³ Since the Gothic’s hybrid forms are so varied and there is sometimes no recognizable correspondence between individual texts, some critics argue that it is more

⁵⁵ Adam Roberts, ‘Gothic and horror fiction’ in Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p 28.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p 33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p 23.

⁵⁸ *The Literature of Terror, Volume I*, p 7.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p 12.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

⁶¹ *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, p x.

⁶² *Ibid*, xii.

⁶³ *Ibid*.

coherent to simply place all such works within that category which Tzvetan Todorov termed the ‘pure fantastic’, fictions which depict an imaginary reality perpetually suspended “between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described”.⁶⁴

Others maintain that in spite of their hybridity, there is an overarching set of characteristics common to the majority of Gothic fictions. Fred Botting has put forward the view that the Gothic can best be understood as a genre informed by what he terms a “negative aesthetics”,⁶⁵ a conscious refusal to adopt the same preconceptions as other types of literary fiction. In particular, he holds that whereas most fiction tacitly assents to theories and models of knowledge “associated with rational procedures of enquiry and understanding based on natural, empirical reality”,⁶⁶ Gothic texts by contrast “disturb the borders of knowing”.⁶⁷ Botting states that the enduring significance of Gothic literature rests on the fact that it is “[n]ot tied to a natural order of things as defined by realism”,⁶⁸ and is free to suggest that our world might be other than it seems. Therefore, this thesis will uphold the view that Gothic fiction constitutes a variety of thought-experiment which writers have used to challenge and critique the conventional vision of things given to us by reason.

When the combination of historical brutality and supernatural intrigue which had sustained the genre since its inception became obsolete in the early nineteenth century, the Gothic started to look elsewhere for new sources of fear. The publication of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818), marked the beginning of the genre’s incorporation of the nascent discipline of science as part of its fictional territory. It would require more space than is available here (and force me to stray yet further from the

⁶⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: a structural approach to a literary genre* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), p 33.

⁶⁵ Fred Botting, *The Gothic* (London: Routledge, 2014), p 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

specific focus of this thesis) to give even the most succinct account of the multifarious ways in which Gothic fiction subsequently drew upon the fields of science and pseudoscience.⁶⁹ However, since the genre had already skilfully exploited the tension between the known and the unknown, it follows that the Gothic should have come to engage more directly with humanity's efforts to subject all mysterious phenomena to rational analysis.

At the same time, just because scientific theories had now become material for Gothic narratives, this did not mean that the genre came to share science's confidence that all of the enigmas of the natural world would eventually be solved. Instead of reassuring the reader, Marshall Brown has written that these "transcendent epistemological fictions"⁷⁰ often seemed designed to leave them with "lingering uncertainties"⁷¹ about the value of scientific progress. *Frankenstein*, the inaugural 'scientific' Gothic text, is a prime example of this. Shelley's novel portrays the scientist not as a hero but an obsessive whose quest to discover the secret of life finally sees him isolated from the rest of humanity in a frozen realm of death. Frankenstein's curiosity results in nothing but horror, and for this he becomes an exile in what Roberts describes as "an environment as far removed from the sorts of environment we are used to as it is possible to find on the surface of the planet".⁷² As we shall see, it would not be the last time the Gothic would use man's displacement in a polar landscape to represent what Roberts terms "a state of being other than the ordinary".⁷³

The Gothic's embracing of science coincided with the genre's adoption and adaptation by American authors, most notably Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel

⁶⁹ For a full examination of the Gothic genre's engagement with science, see David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Volume 2: The Modern Gothic Tradition* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996).

⁷⁰ Marshall Brown, 'A Philosophical View of the Gothic Novel' in Fred Botting and Dale Townshend ed. *Gothic: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. 1* (London: Routledge, 2004), p 173.

⁷¹ Ibid, p 183.

⁷² Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p 43.

⁷³ Ibid.

Hawthorne, Herman Melville and Poe himself. If the earlier phase of Gothic literature had given expression to the anxiety and unease beneath the surface of the English Enlightenment, Groom writes that “America’s difference presented the opportunity for a new sort of literature, a new sort of Gothic”.⁷⁴ While Britain was by then in the process of forging the world’s largest empire, the United States was, in Groom’s words, “a frontier society on the edge of the most extreme and threatening landscapes then imaginable”.⁷⁵ David Mogen, Scott Sanders and Joanne Karpinski have argued that America’s dark forests, vast wildernesses and boundless oceans “offered resources for literary invention”⁷⁶ which reinvigorated Gothic fiction. Instead of the cloistered castles and dungeons which dominated the Gothic texts of the previous century, in the imaginations of American writers their own strange and mysterious homeland and the seas surrounding it now became a setting “in which to dramatise fundamental conflicts about the nature of reality”.⁷⁷

The Antarctic Gothic texts examined in this thesis are a product of this geographical and cultural shift. As America began to expand its own imperial interests early in the nineteenth century, it looked towards those distant territories outside of its own shores which still remained unexplored. In November 1820, three years before James Weddell ventured into the Southern Ocean, an American mariner named Nathaniel Palmer sailed below the South Shetland Islands and into Antarctic waters searching for new seal colonies. Although it is uncertain exactly what latitude he reached, it is possible that Palmer went further south than Weddell and may even have sighted the Antarctic

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction*, p 114.

⁷⁶ David Mogen, Scott P. Sanders, and Joanne B. Karpinski, Introduction to Mogen, Sanders and Karpinski ed. *Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1993), p 14.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Peninsula.⁷⁸ Nine years later, the American government gave its approval for the Palmer-Pendleton Expedition, whose goals were to “demystify the nature of the Antarctic”⁷⁹ and lay claim to any lands discovered in this region on behalf of the United States. This scientific and commercial expedition was abandoned before it even entered the Southern Ocean,⁸⁰ but William E. Lenz has written that its dismal failure established Antarctica not only “as an unknown locale but as a distinctive locus of symbolic meaning”⁸¹ in the imagination of the American public. As he explains, the Antarctic “took on the allegorical aura of the last true *terra incognita*, which had previously been associated with the American West”.⁸² The doomed Palmer-Pendleton Expedition may also have supplied Poe with the theme for his very first Antarctic Gothic fiction, ‘MS. Found in a Bottle’ (1832).⁸³

⁷⁸ For more on this controversy, see David Day, *Antarctica: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p 316.

⁷⁹ Ian N. Higginson, ‘The First Antarctic Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe’, *The Polar Record*, Vol. 30, No. 175 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p 290.

⁸⁰ Its plans to make an extensive polar voyage were undone by a combination of factors, including atrocious weather conditions, drunkenness, and insubordination. See *Antarctica: A Biography*, p 48-50.

⁸¹ William E. Lenz, *The Poetics of the Antarctic: A Study in Nineteenth-Century American Cultural Perceptions* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), p 92.

⁸² William E. Lenz, ‘Poe’s *Arthur Gordon Pym* and the Narrative Technique of the Antarctic Gothic’, *The CEA Critic*, Vol. 53, Issue 3, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p 33.

⁸³ Ian N. Higginson makes a fascinating, if unconventional, argument for the Pendleton-Palmer Expedition as the inspiration for this tale in ‘The First Antarctic Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe’ *The Polar Record*, vol. 30, no.175 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p 287-298.

Section 4: The Antarctic Gothic: Definition of a Subgenre

Having briefly surveyed the historical development of the Gothic and noted how the genre came to encompass what Clive Bloom has described as “much of popular fiction’s imaginative territory”,⁸⁴ I am now in a position to define the Antarctic Gothic: it is a subgenre of Gothic literature which focuses specifically on the South Polar Regions and represents them as a realm of absolute Otherness, what Tuan has termed an ‘alien space’ of dread and “numinous terror”⁸⁵ where man should not venture. The forms of uncanny phenomena depicted in these works are imaginative extensions of the naturally enigmatic conditions of the Antarctic. From optical illusions to the ambiguity surrounding its topography, these literary texts incorporate the deceptiveness inherent in Antarctic experience and portray the far south as a Gothic landscape where the intellect is undermined and overwhelmed. As Frederick S. Frank and Diane Long Hoeveler have argued, in Poe’s imagination the extreme southern latitudes became a “globalised gothic castle”⁸⁶ where all appearances are false, a world of primal mystery later explored by other authors.

This conception of the Antarctic as a place of profound metaphysical uncertainty gives rise to a terrifying vision of nature itself. In Antarctic Gothic fiction, what Spufford terms the “Romantic reverence for the otherness of nature”⁸⁷ metamorphoses into an awestruck fear, as the far southern environment is revealed as ever more monstrous and abnormal. Also, as William E. Lenz has observed, the idea that “[s]omething immanent centres in the Antarctic, something identified by its whiteness, its blankness, its starkness,

⁸⁴ Clive Bloom, *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, 2nd Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p 2.

⁸⁵ ‘Ultima Thule: Arthur Gordon Pym, the Polar Imaginary, and the Hollow Earth’, p 51.

⁸⁶ Frederick S. Frank and Diane Long Hoeveler ed. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, p 26.

⁸⁷ *I May Be Some Time*, p 77.

and its inhumanness”⁸⁸ is central to this subgenre. The South Polar Regions are portrayed as withholding some supreme secret, some revelatory knowledge about the origin and workings of the universe. Given its extreme remoteness and otherworldliness, Antarctic Gothic fiction tantalizingly suggests that this polar land offers a glimpse of a transcendent order or a vision of prehistory which can be obtained nowhere else. Consequently, reaching the Antarctic becomes an obsession for the protagonists of many of these Gothic works, and their quests culminate in scenes of hallucinatory horror.

If earlier Gothic works relied upon shadows and darkness to evoke a fear of the unknown, the source of terror in Antarctic Gothic texts is an inescapable, radiant whiteness. The next chapter will examine how Pym’s polar voyage takes him to an island where white things are abominated before he enters a zone where everything is devoid of colour. In this manner, the subgenre overturns traditional notions of perception by suggesting that, rather than any definite object, the most disturbing phenomenon imaginable is a space characterised by a complete absence of aesthetic qualities. As Melville’s Ishmael notes while contemplating the great whale in *Moby-Dick* (1851), the elusiveness of whiteness incites a “vague, nameless horror”⁸⁹ which “strikes more of panic to the soul than the redness which affrights in blood”.⁹⁰ A landscape of total whiteness, the Antarctic is therefore a realm which possesses what Melville terms a “higher horror”.⁹¹

⁸⁸ *The Poetics of the Antarctic*, p 92.

⁸⁹ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick or, The Whale* (London: Penguin, 2003), p 204.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p 205.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p 210. In the course of his disquisition on ‘The Whiteness of the Whale’ in chapter forty-two of the novel, Melville also makes what may be allusions to two of the more memorable incarnations of spectral whiteness in the closing episode of *Arthur Gordon Pym*. Firstly, he refers to a strange “milky sea,” (p 211) recalling the white polar ocean on which Pym sails. Secondly, he refers to a “shrouded phantom of the whitened waters,” (p 210) much like the shrouded human figure which rises up before Pym as he arrives at the polar vortex. Melville also draws a direct comparison between the sight of the whale’s whiteness and the observations of a sailor “beholding the scenery of the Antarctic seas; where at times, by some infernal trick of legerdemain in the powers of frost and air, he, shivering and half shipwrecked, instead of rainbows speaking hope and solace to his misery, views what seems a boundless church-yard grinning upon him with its lean ice monuments and splintered crosses” (p 211).

Evaluating Antarctica's uniqueness as a Gothic setting, China Miéville has written that because of its whiteness it "offers the stark symbolism of being a great blank space, a continent-wide screen on which the human mind can project its fears".⁹² Most frequently, the far south has been a site for the projection of racial anxieties. Exploiting both contemporary racial theories and the vision of Antarctica as a land of purity where mankind's ancient origins are made manifest, Poe and Lovecraft's Gothic narratives use the region's dichotomy of light and darkness to construct figurations of race which demonise blackness but also portray whiteness as something equally alien.

Another defining characteristic of the Antarctic Gothic subgenre is its focus on collapsing such categorical distinctions as past and present and life and death. By penetrating this white expanse, explorers are represented as being able to move back through time, sometimes unleashing terrible things in the process. Since it is a location which allows "our supposed atavistic and repressed anxieties to be put on ice",⁹³ Miéville states that Antarctica has become "almost vulgarly overdetermined as a site for psychically anxious fictions".⁹⁴ Out of the depths of these frozen wastes can emerge creatures from the primordial past or alien beings marooned on earth millennia ago. Finally, these Gothic texts are defined by their form. As speculative fictions inspired by the unfolding narrative of Antarctic exploration, both their style and semblance of realism derive from actual expeditions accounts. Their close imitation of the technical details of exploration narratives means that they can also be regarded as important early works of science fiction.

⁹² China Miéville, Introduction to H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), p xvii.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

Section 5: Antarctica in Fact and Fiction: Previous Scholarship

In his book *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* (2003), Stephen J. Pyne claims that, since it lacks an indigenous culture, the closest Antarctica has to a literary tradition are the accounts of its most famous explorers. Instead of inspiring any great works of fiction, he states that the continent “has been largely a wasteland for imaginative literature”.⁹⁵ In this thesis I shall take issue with this view, and demonstrate that by envisioning those areas of the far south which remained undiscovered, Gothic writers produced an array of ingenious narratives which actually extended the creative potential of their literary mode. As well as these authors, the exploration of the Polar Regions acted as a focal point for numerous other creative figures: the German Expressionist poet Georg Heym wrote a pair of macabre short stories about journeys to the South Pole;⁹⁶ to mark Scott’s memorial service, *The London Evening News* published a short account of the explorer’s demise intended for schoolchildren, in which the Welsh Gothic novelist and mystic Arthur Machen portrayed his self-sacrifice as a mighty spiritual act;⁹⁷ the Austrian Symbolist artist, author and Poe illustrator Alfred Kubin also produced a series of magnificently sinister images relating to the Poles [Fig. 3,4].

⁹⁵ *The Ice*, p 153.

⁹⁶ Georg Heym, ‘The Travellers to the South Pole’ and ‘Shakleton[sic]’s Diary’. See *The Wide White Page*, p 87-98, 306.

⁹⁷ Arthur Machen, *The Immortal Story of Capt. Scott’s Expedition: How Five Brave Englishmen Died* (London: The London Evening News Press, 1913). See Max Jones, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott’s Antarctic Sacrifice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p 256.

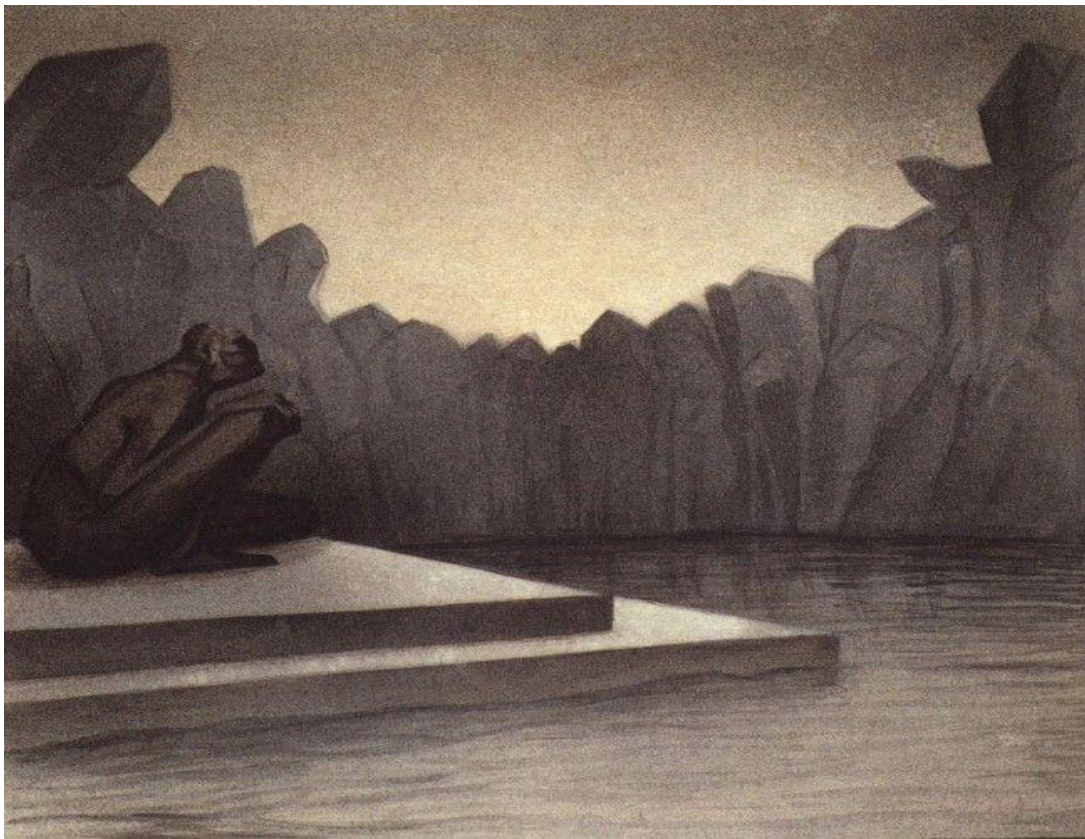


Fig. 3,4: Alfred Kubin, *The North Pole* (1901) and *Polar Guardian* (1910)

In composing my own arguments I have drawn upon the work of several writers who, in the last thirty years, have focused on the depiction of Antarctica as a Gothic space. More specifically, my analysis follows on from the work of William E. Lenz, who first put forward the term ‘Antarctic Gothic’ to describe the polar fictions of Poe and other authors in his journal article ‘Poe’s *Arthur Gordon Pym* and the Narrative Techniques of Antarctic Gothic’ (1991) and his book *The Poetics of the Antarctic: A Study in Nineteenth-Century American Cultural Perceptions* (1995). In these he argues that the Antarctic “like the Gothic mode itself, is a doorway to the deepest regions of our primitive imagination”,⁹⁸ and a geographical space which “brings together the eternal mysteries of the human condition, the Absolute Abstractions, in a concrete, assailable form”.⁹⁹ Although he does not give an exact definition of the Antarctic Gothic or suggest that it constitutes a literary subgenre, Lenz gives important, contextualised readings of all of Poe’s far southern stories. In these, he stresses the overlapping intellectual concerns of Gothic fiction and exploration narratives, and also provides an invaluable assessment of America’s changing attitude to the Antarctic in this period.

Elizabeth Leane has adopted Lenz’s term in her pioneering and exhaustive study *Antarctica in Fiction: Imaginative Narratives of the Far South* (2012). In a chapter analysing the continent’s representation in horror and supernatural literature, Leane uses the term Antarctic Gothic to describe Poe’s polar tales as well as those by his contemporaries which were written before the existence of the Antarctic landmass was scientifically corroborated. Leane also traces the legacy of Poe’s polar fictions, and the impact of their imagery on subsequent imaginative depictions of the far south. However, while she does give an account of its overall characteristics, she does not define the term either.

⁹⁸ ‘Poe’s *Arthur Gordon Pym* and the Narrative Technique of the Antarctic Gothic’, p 37.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

Leane's attempt to systematically assess works of Antarctic Gothic literature was anticipated by Jules Zanger, whose journal article 'Poe's Endless Voyage: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*' (1986) charts the novel's influence on later fantastical Antarctic fictions. Through a series of nuanced readings, Zanger illustrates how Antarctic Gothic texts have been defined by different approaches to depicting this geographical realm. More recently, Darryl Jones has argued for *Arthur Gordon Pym*'s status as a key text in an even broader spectrum of fiction concerned with both Arctic and Antarctic exploration, the Polar Imaginary. In his words, "it is the case that the Polar Imaginary often conflates the two poles, and sometimes treats them as aspects of the same thing, or as indistinguishable",¹⁰⁰ but whether they take place in the extreme north or far south, these quests all ultimately conclude with their protagonists being swept into "a singularity from which no information can escape, a limit-point of speech and communication".¹⁰¹

In addition to critical studies and scholarly editions of individual authors, my research has also benefited greatly from the insights provided by a range of works of cultural history which analyse not only the representation of Antarctica but polar exploration in general. Chief amongst these is Francis Spufford's *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (1996), an encyclopaedic treatment of this subject whose elucidations of the development of polar discourse in the Romantic period and its expansion into a cultural phenomenon in the Edwardian era are especially informative. Spufford's *To the Ends of the Earth: The Antarctic* (2007) and Bill Manhire's *The Wide White Page: Writer's Imagine Antarctica* (2004), two excellent anthologies of writing on the far south, bring together the continent's factual and fictional histories. Victoria Nelson's essay 'Symmes Hole, or the South Polar Grotto', in her thematic collection *The Secret Life of Puppets* (2001), offers a skilful synthesis of Antarctic expeditions both real

¹⁰⁰ 'Ultima Thule: *Arthur Gordon Pym*, the Polar Imaginary, and the Hollow Earth', p 52.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p 65.

and imaginary, and reveals how a persistent set of notions has surrounded the region since ancient times. Joscelyn Godwin's volume of esoterica *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival* (1993) also examines how these frozen realms have stimulated human curiosity over the centuries. Finally, no study of this subject could be attempted without consulting the massive annotated bibliography of Antarctic fiction compiled over three decades by the late Fauno Lancaster Cordes, which has now become an indispensable online resource for anyone with a scholarly interest in the cultural representation of the South Polar Regions.

Section 6: *Terra Incognita: Antarctica from Myth to Reality*

In defining the Antarctic Gothic subgenre I have asserted that it constitutes an authentic form of speculative fiction. By adopting the style and sensibility of scientific accounts (and sometimes lifting material directly from them), the novels and stories discussed in the following chapters present descriptions of this region which corresponded to the known facts about its geography and would not have seemed altogether implausible to contemporary readers. Indeed, this insistence on maintaining a semblance of realism is one of the factors which distinguish Antarctic Gothic texts from those works of purely fantastic literature featuring the far south. However, as well as incorporating the most recent exploration data, many Antarctic Gothic fictions (particularly those written in the nineteenth century) also engage with a much earlier set of speculative notions concerning the South Polar Regions. Therefore, before I commence my analysis of individual texts, I shall provide a very concise overview of Antarctica's intellectual history in order to show how this may have influenced its depiction in Gothic literature.

The concept of an Antarctic continent dates almost as far back as civilization itself. As early as 330 BCE Aristotle advanced the theory that the great northern landmass must have a southern counterpart in his treatise *Meteorologica*. In ancient Greek cosmology the globe was composed of two distinct hemispheres separated by a belt of fire, and since the cold lands of the northern hemisphere were named the *Arktikos* their polar opposites received the designation *Antarktikos*. In the second century AD, Ptolemy used the Greek conception of the cosmos as the integrating principle of his massive synthesis of astronomical, geographical and astrological knowledge. In his *Geographia* (150 AD) he compiled the first comprehensive map of the known world, and projected the existence of a southern landmass located in the gulf between Africa and Asia which counterbalanced the

great continent of the north. Like Aristotle, Ptolemy believed that this southern country was fertile, inhabited and essentially the mirror image of that in the north.

The concept of the Poles is even older. Originally envisaged by the Pre-Socratic philosophers as two fixed points or cosmological loci existing outside of the terrestrial sphere, over time they were transmuted into the *axis mundi* or pillar of the world, the central point of connection between Earth and the heavens. Since no travellers had reached the globe's icy extremities, Eric G. Wilson has written that "[i]n the ancient Western world, the poles appeared as blank screens on which men projected conflicting desires – their yearning for polarity, a harmony between opposites, and their longing for hierarchy, a relationship between unequal antimonies".¹⁰² Only with the discoveries of Copernicus did the Poles gradually transform from spaces of pure abstraction into actual geographical locations. However, with this shift the Polar Regions themselves came to acquire very different sets of values. While the extreme latitudes of the northern hemisphere were regarded as compatible with the *oikoumene* or 'known world' and seen as a sacred place of reason and civilization, the *terra australis incognita* of the south embodied what Wilson describes as its "dark other, the alien planet – the antihuman, the monstrous".¹⁰³ Consequently, he writes that this region became "the world's unconscious, a reservoir of its repressed terrors"¹⁰⁴ and somewhere which "was literally dreadful *beyond* words, haunting men with utter darkness or unrelieved glare".¹⁰⁵

And yet, the secrets of Antarctica continued to prove irresistible to the human mind. The tremendous mysterious potential of the far south can clearly be gauged from Gerardus Mercator's pioneering 1569 world map, which depicts the outline of an enormous continent at the base of the Earth [**Fig.5**]. On the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, created the

¹⁰² Eric G. Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science and the Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p 143.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p 145.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p 146.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

following year by the cartographer Abraham Ortelius and generally considered the first modern atlas, Antarctica is once again represented as a vast, blank underworld occupying an impressively large portion of the lower half of the globe [Fig.6]. As the Renaissance continued to reshape the intellectual world, the Poles and the mysterious lands surrounding them became incorporated into a number of elaborate speculative geographical systems. The most famous of these was devised by the German Jesuit and polymath, Athanasius Kircher.



Fig. 5: Map of the World (1569) by Gerardus Mercator



Fig. 6: *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570) by Abraham Ortelius

Intrigued by the Earth's volcanic activity and the movements of the tides, Kircher postulated that the planet was in fact a hollow sphere. In his elaborate scientific miscellany *Mundus Subterraneus* (1665), he advanced the theory that the Poles were in fact huge openings at either end of the globe. Cold sea water was drawn upwards by magnetic currents to the North Pole, where it was sucked in through a giant vortex. It then travelled down into the fiery core of the Earth, and emerged again via a great whirlpool at the South Pole [Fig.7, 8]. Just as the human body absorbed and expelled water, keeping it cool and healthy, Kircher believed that God had provided the planet with an identical regulatory system. Also, although he argued that the heat at the centre of the Earth was too intense for humans to endure, he thought it possible that volcanoes might allow explorers access to large pockets of habitable space inside the planet. As the next chapter will examine, Kircher's theory of a hollow earth outlived him, and was still being upheld by some figures in the early nineteenth century.

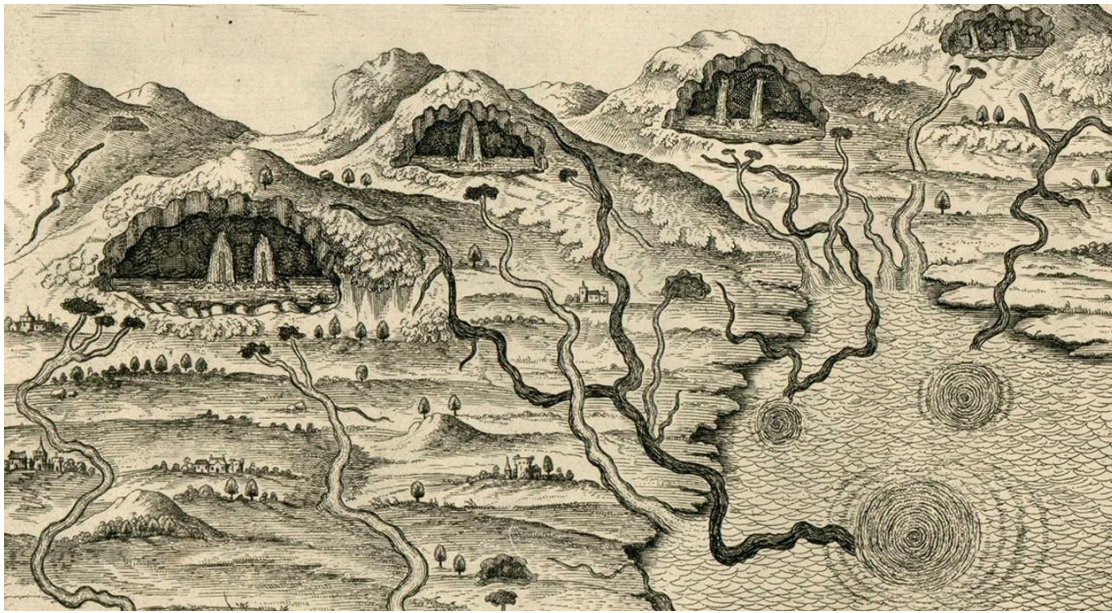


Fig. 7: Volcanic System, illustration for *Mundus Subterraneus* (1665)

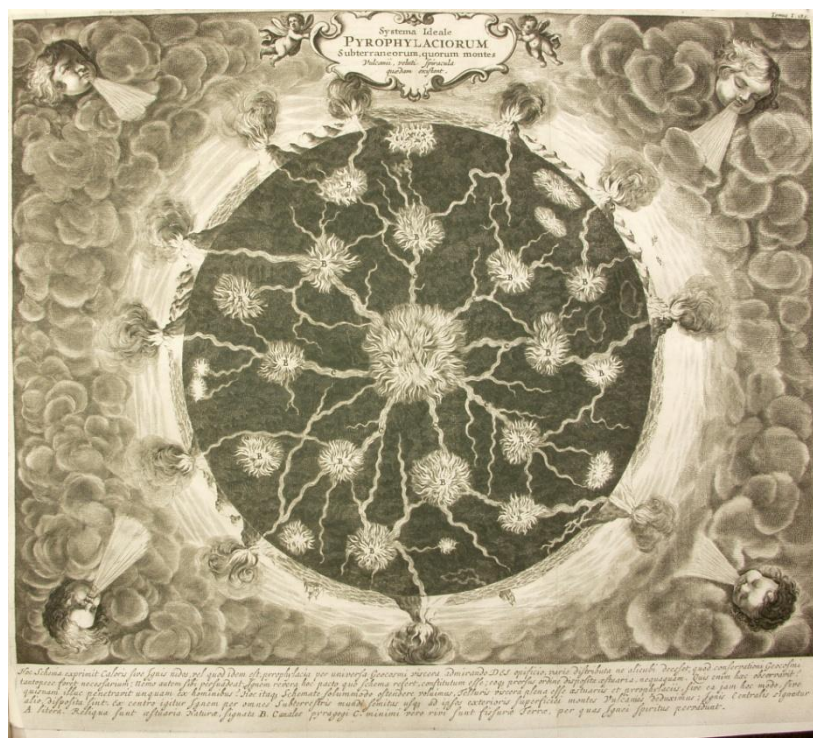


Fig. 8: The System of the World, illustration for *Mundus Subterraneus* (1665)

Therefore, when Poe embarked on his literary career, the Polar Regions still represented what Mark Canada has termed “[b]oth a geographical and a mental realm”¹⁰⁶ which amounted to “a delicious field for speculation”.¹⁰⁷ Kircher’s theory clearly belonged to another time, but since modern science had not yet replaced it with something more mundane it continued to offer entire inner and outer worlds for writers of fiction to explore. The exact nature of Antarctica, in particular, remained essentially as uncertain as it had been in the time of the ancients. However, for Poe this “mystery at the world’s end”,¹⁰⁸ to use Spufford’s term, would become a place of terrifying and uncanny phenomena. In his imagination, the vortexes, maelströms and abysses which had been used to fill in the great blank space of the *terra incognita* in the speculative cartographies of earlier ages, would transform into what Spufford calls “menacing thresholds”,¹⁰⁹ gateways which might lead anywhere. He was determined to take his fellow travellers on a voyage to the farthest reaches of the unknown.

¹⁰⁶ Mark Canada, ‘The Polar Regions’ in Kevin J. Hayes ed. *Edgar Allan Poe in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p 70.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p 63.

¹⁰⁸ *I May be Some Time*, p 76.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Chapter Two:
“Hurrying On to the Southward”: Edgar Allan Poe’s
The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket

Introduction

On August 18th 1838 six vessels left the navy yard at Norfolk, Virginia and set out on a momentous voyage into the unknown. Conceived as a bid to prove that America could compete with the other great imperial nations in laying claim to new territories and increasing the sum of scientific knowledge for all, the United States Exploring Expedition was launched amid much fanfare. A lavish and grandiose undertaking, the expedition was the most important endeavour of its kind since that of Lewis and Clark more than thirty years earlier. Its four year voyage saw it circumnavigate the globe and penetrate some of the most mysterious regions on earth.¹

The results were impressive. The expedition produced the first completely accurate charts of the Pacific Ocean, made a survey of 280 Pacific islands, mapped 800 miles of the Oregon coast and a 100 mile section of the Colombia River. When its scientific corps returned to American shores in July 1842 they brought with them an unprecedented quantity of new data which took years to assimilate. Meanwhile, the number of specimens amassed was so vast that they eventually formed the basis of the collections of several of the nation's great museums. However, despite all these accomplishments there existed a common perception that the expedition only ever had one goal: discovering the true nature of what lay below the Antarctic Circle.²

The man chiefly responsible for the belief that determining what existed at the South Pole constituted the expedition's real mission was the same man who had brought it into being. For ten years Jeremiah N. Reynolds had campaigned for a federally funded exploratory voyage to be sent to the South Pacific and beyond. Not content with simply

¹ The most comprehensive account of the history, discoveries, and reception of the U.S. Exploring Expedition is Nathaniel Philbrick's *Sea of Glory: The Epic South Seas Expedition 1838-42* (London: Harper Prenal, 2005).

² David Day has provided a clear assessment of the Exploring Expedition's contribution to Antarctic exploration in *Antarctica: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p 47-48, 56-60.

lobbying for this, Reynolds sought an active role in the venture. In 1829 he joined the crew of the privately funded Pendleton-Palmer Expedition, but came no closer to the Pole than the South Shetland Islands. Undaunted, Reynolds continued to promote the view that by exploring the higher southern latitudes America would find rich sealing grounds and make countless valuable scientific discoveries.

Instrumental in convincing the nation that the Antarctic was a region the U.S. urgently needed to make its own was Reynolds's 1836 *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas*. In this address Reynolds maintained that America should protect its already substantial interests in the Pacific by fitting out a scientific expedition to "enlarge and correct the charts of every portion of sea and land"³ in the region. Turning his attention to the Antarctic, Reynolds adopted a different rhetorical strategy. Instead of purely practical benefits, Reynolds made a compelling case for extending "our researches to regions surrounding the South Pole"⁴ on the grounds that scientific knowledge should be pursued both for its own sake and for the sake of national prestige. While other nations used up their enormous resources in the Arctic, interminably searching for a Northwest Passage connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, Reynolds argued that a "field of discovery"⁵ of even greater significance was already within America's grasp.

Setting out his evidence, Reynolds wrote that the "efforts to explore the higher latitudes south"⁶ had thus far been "[f]ew, feeble, and far between".⁷ Taken together, he held that the information recently amassed by the British explorers Weddell and Briscoe and the Russian Kruzenstern refuted Captain Cook's longstanding view that if there was an

³ Jeremiah Reynolds, *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836), p 72.

⁴ Ibid, p 86.

⁵ Ibid, p 90.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Antarctic continent it could never be conquered because of the impenetrable ice of the Southern Ocean. For Reynolds, their reports of iceless waters and warm temperatures amounted to “confirmation”⁸ of the “existence of southern lands”⁹ which could be reached by sea. He calculated there were “more than one million and a half square miles, which have never been trodden by the footsteps of man”¹⁰, all of which was America’s for the taking. In his words, the Antarctic continent was destined to become the “noble theatre”¹¹ where the U.S. would “contend for mastery with the nations of the earth”.¹²

Moreover, as someone who had “beheld in all its terror and sublimity, that castellated region of floating crystal pyramids”,¹³ it was Reynolds’s contention not only that the U.S. could claim the Antarctic but his “deliberate opinion”¹⁴ that “the ninetieth degree, or the South Pole, may be reached”.¹⁵ Reynolds concluded his argument by presenting a stirring vision of intrepid American explorers “pushing their barks into high southern latitudes”¹⁶ and there, “amid the novelty, grandeur, and sublimity of the scene”,¹⁷ they would surely “cast anchor at that point where all meridians terminate, where our eagle and star-spangled banner may be unfurled and planted, and left to wave on the axis of the earth itself”.¹⁸

One month before the departure of the epic Antarctic voyage Reynolds had masterminded, another, infinitely more bizarre journey to the South Pole had reached its conclusion. Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* - henceforth *Arthur Gordon Pym* - began life as a serial narrative, the first instalments of

⁸ Ibid, p 94.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, p 90.

¹¹ Ibid, p 96.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, p 97.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, p 99.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

which were written in late 1836 and published in the January and February 1837 issues of the *Southern Literary Messenger* [Fig.9]. After his abrupt departure from that magazine, Poe made these instalments the opening chapters of his first and only full-length work. It took him more than five months to compose the remainder of the book, before it was copyrighted in June 1837. However, like the perpetual delays which beset the Exploring Expedition, the novel's tortuously protracted genesis was not over yet. Poe had to wait a further year before *Arthur Gordon Pym* was published. When it finally appeared, it failed to achieve popularity and quickly sank without a trace.



Fig. 9: Portrait of Edgar Allan Poe drawn in 1837, the year the first instalments of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* were published

Reynolds successfully converted America to the cause of Antarctic exploration by presenting it as a monumental adventure, one more daring and more dignified than any mankind had previously attempted. As Nathaniel Philbrick has written, Reynolds arguments amounted to a “patriotic call to science”¹⁹ proposing a magnificent enterprise befitting “the giant size and boundless ambition of the young nation”.²⁰ At the heart of

¹⁹ *Sea of Glory*, p 31.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Reynolds's writings was a patriotic dream image of America as a new world power, one still in the process of discovering itself, boldly laying claim to the most remote region on earth in defiance of all the older imperial nations. The reward for this would be the enduring glory of having solved the last great riddle of modern navigation: what existed at the very base of the world?

While Reynolds promoted this dream, in Poe's imagination Antarctic exploration had become a nightmare. *Arthur Gordon Pym* has been the subject of almost every form of critical analysis, and has given rise to an exceptionally diverse array of interpretations. As noted in the introductory chapter, the most basic facts about the novel - what its true plot is, what Poe's objective was in writing it, and what relationship it has to the factual history of exploration - remain strongly contested. There has also been much speculation about how the text developed, the works of fact and fiction which were integral to its composition, and even disagreement about whether it is complete or actually unfinished. However, amid all this critical debate one important attribute of Poe's creation has frequently been disregarded: *Arthur Gordon Pym* is the ultimate work of Antarctic Gothic fiction.

In Poe's novel every feature of Reynold's *Address* used to make the exploration of the Southern Ocean appear like some vast adventure is grotesquely transformed and made part of Pym's chaotic struggle for survival. In place of a series of thrilling exploits, from the moment he leaves Nantucket Pym's existence takes the form of a sequence of harrowing ordeals, each more horrific than the last. However, the host of terrifying incidents which Pym is involved in during the first two-thirds of the novel are but a prelude to his final confrontation with the supreme enigma which lies at the far south.

Having crossed the Antarctic Circle, the strangeness of Pym's voyage multiplies disconcertingly. Instead of the dread of shipwreck, thirst and starvation, he now contends

with creatures whose alien nature is manifest in an absolute physical blackness and a polar island made up of phenomena so unnatural that it can barely be recognised as belonging to this planet. After his escape from this island Pym gives himself up to the unfathomable yet inescapable lure of the Pole, and the monomaniacal impulse which has compelled him to the end of the known world. Moving outside of all established knowledge but still seeking meaning, Pym then crosses a phantasmagorical polar sea. On the brink of the Pole itself, his narrative breaks off as he beholds a great white figure who may only be a harbinger of even more incredible realms beyond.

While the South Pole had traditionally been regarded as a place of unearthly fear, and had been depicted in this manner in works as famous as Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798), it was Poe's novel which established the conventions of the Antarctic Gothic tale. The doomed quest for vital knowledge, the fantastic isolation of the protagonists amid a preternatural and overwhelmingly hostile environment, their encounters with phenomena which defy every account of reality advanced by science; all of the key elements of the Antarctic Gothic narratives examined in this thesis first came together in *Arthur Gordon Pym*.

Therefore, it by no means devalues *Arthur Gordon Pym* to describe it as a masterwork of horror literature. As this chapter shall examine, Poe's Gothic configuration of the Antarctic was an artistic move largely determined by the unique possibilities presented by the South Pole. It shall be shown that although Poe was probably familiar with earlier works which had capitalized on the Antarctic by representing it as a destination for imaginary voyages, he approached it differently. Utilizing the popular genre of the Gothic sea story, Poe's narrative of a journey to the South Polar *terra incognita* sees him transcend the trappings of merely sensational horror in favour of an all-consuming metaphysical terror.

For centuries an unknowable void onto which geographers, explorers, and writers had projected their timeless fears, in Poe's novel the Antarctic becomes a quintessential Gothic space, a deceptive realm in which the concept of a comprehensible natural order is overwhelmed by monstrous uncertainty. Even though a polar voyage had been the theme of one of his earliest tales, 'MS. Found in a Bottle' (1832), there can be little doubt that the imminent departure of a scientific mission for the Antarctic was the reason why Poe made the region the focus of his novel. However, this chapter will explore how Poe creatively exploited the speculative nature of scientific inquiry in this period and combined the details of actual polar travel accounts with contemporary pseudoscientific theories to fabricate his own gothicized Antarctic world. It shall also consider *Arthur Gordon Pym* as a text which provides a fictional completion of several inconclusive earlier polar voyages as well as imaginatively anticipating the outcome of the U.S. Exploring Expedition. The relationship between Poe's novel and actual exploration literature shall be further examined by comparing Pym's discoveries to the account of William Reynolds, who sailed with the expedition and was one of the first people to sight the Antarctic Continent.

Above all, by concentrating on Poe's strategies for depicting the Antarctic, a realm whose true nature remained a matter of conjecture, this chapter shall establish how his novel represents the whole project of exploration as an essentially Gothic activity. Unlike the image of irresistible expansion promoted by Reynolds, *Arthur Gordon Pym* presents exploration as a series of frightening, destabilizing and often deadly encounters with the unknown, leading to Pym's climactic recognition of the essential Otherness of the phenomenal reality he inhabits. The reading of the novel's final chapter in section four shall reveal how the text and its subject come to mirror each other, as the fundamental ambiguity of Pym's narrative finds its parallel in the shifting uncertainties which characterise Poe's Antarctic regions. In this way, this chapter will illustrate how Poe

capitalised on the mystery of what was lurking at the Pole to create a Gothic landscape of wonder and terror.

**Section 1: “A Wide Field Open and Nearly Untouched”:²¹ Arthur Gordon Pym,
Jeremiah Reynolds, The United States Exploring Expedition, and the Speculative
Antarctic**

To begin tracing the origin of Poe’s Gothic vision of the South Polar Regions it is first necessary to consider the curious position the Antarctic occupied in early 19th Century thought. After being generally forgotten following the second voyage of Captain Cook in the mid 1770s, the discussion over the existence of an Antarctic continent reignited after the findings of James Weddell and other mariners became widely known in the early 1820s. Given the fierce international competition to acquire new territories, the idea that there might remain a vast, wholly unexplored, and potentially bountiful land across the gulf of the Antarctic Ocean was one which no great nation could afford to ignore, least of all the U.S. Indeed, as Jeremiah Reynolds outlined in his *Address*, America’s commercial activities in the Southern Ocean had grown to the point where it would be disastrous if another nation were to claim any greater territories lying near to the Pole.

The accumulation of revolutionary reports about Antarctic conditions, along with Reynolds’s persuasive interpretation of this data, were enough to make even the U.S. Navy, a defiantly traditional institution, accept the intriguing notion that there might be accessible regions worthy of exploration in the vicinity of the Pole itself. Consequently, the debate concerning the far south intensified and the American public was faced with a range of possibilities as to what was on the other side of the great ice barrier: was there nothing but open sea leading all the way to the earth’s axis? Was there only a scattering of polar islands? Was the myth of a Great Southern Land no myth after all, and did some form of tropical continent exist there? Were none of these hypotheses correct, and did the ice wall

²¹ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘Review of *An Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas* by J.N. Reynolds’ in G.R. Thompson ed. *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews* (New York: Library of America, 1984), p 1236.

conceal a realm totally new to science? In this way, in the years before the launch of the U.S. Exploring Expedition a great many American citizens had already been making imaginative journeys to a multitude of polar worlds.

Once again, it was Reynolds who stimulated these new conceptions of the Antarctic. He certainly did not understate the size of the potential discoveries to be made in the region. In a series of reports to the Navy he put together an impressive catalogue of the hundreds of South Sea islands which American ships had already located by chance in their search for whales and seals, cruises exactly like the one which Poe's 'Jane Guy' is initially engaged on in *Arthur Gordon Pym*. Contradicting every argument why a national expedition would prove a failure, Reynolds explained that these commercial vessels were often known to "venture into high southern latitudes",²² and could frequently be found even "within the south [A]ntarctic circle".²³ In this fashion, he let it be known that spectacularly profitable voyages to regions very close to the Pole were already being made.

Summarising his plan, Reynolds observed that there was "an immense extent of ocean in the high southern latitude"²⁴ at the centre of which was a "mighty space of which the world is as yet ignorant".²⁵ According to him, all the evidence suggested that this unknown polar territory was rich in resources and possibly even habitable, and he wrote that there was every reason to believe that a fully equipped scientific expedition "may advance with no great difficulty into very high latitudes, if not the 90th degree itself".²⁶ If the cargoes being brought back from the Southern Ocean by American vessels were a reliable indicator, the thought of what could be found further south and what lands might be discovered surrounding the Pole was tantalizing indeed. Therefore, David Day observes

²² Jeremiah Reynolds, 'Information Collected by the Navy Department Relating to Islands, Reefs, Shoals, Etc., in the Pacific Ocean and South Seas, and Showing the Expediency of an Exploring Expedition in that Ocean and those Seas by the Navy' 29 January 1835, *American State Papers: Naval Affairs* Vol. 4., (Washington: Gale's and Seaton, 1861), p 698.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, p 689.

²⁵ Ibid, p 690.

²⁶ Ibid, p 698.

that although Reynolds made an effort “to portray himself primarily as a champion of Pacific exploration, and motivated by commercial rather than scientific impulses”,²⁷ he also “remained privately committed to reaching the South Pole by ship”.²⁸

Reynolds’s personal curiosity to know what existed at the South Pole may have outweighed his interest in increasing his nation’s territorial and commercial assets, but there was no doubting the assiduousness with which he dedicated himself to promoting Antarctic exploration. When he took up this cause in the late 1820s America had recently completed the transition from a nation which, in Michael F. Robinson’s words, “did not pay much attention to geographical discovery”,²⁹ to one which Mark Canada characterises as “deeply engaged in geographic exploration”.³⁰ Despite the many exploration possibilities which presented themselves in this era, it was Reynolds’s campaign to have a major scientific expedition sent to the far south which finally won both official and public approval. For this reason, it is little wonder that even after Reynolds was excluded from the Exploring Expedition Poe described him as “the prime mover...the indomitable advocate of the enterprise”.³¹

Reynolds made a compelling case for the existence of some form of valuable new territory below the Antarctic Circle, but his arguments did little to establish exactly *what* was there. The ensuing debate about the true nature of the South Polar Regions perfectly reflected the unstructured state of science in America in this period. Stephen Matterson has observed that Poe was writing “at a time when our modern distinctions between science, pseudo-science and entertainment were developing, and at a time when individual branches

²⁷ *Antarctica: A Biography*, p 57.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Michael F. Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), p 15.

³⁰ Mark Canada, ‘The Polar Regions’ in Kevin J. Hayes ed. *Edgar Allan Poe in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p 63.

³¹ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘Review of A Brief Account of the Discoveries and Results of the United States’ Exploring Expedition’ in Thompson ed. *Essays and Reviews*, p 1251.

of scientific thought were being defined”.³² The early 19th Century was what Harold Beaver has termed “an age for amateurs”,³³ in which science had not yet become a field of study in its own right in American universities. Since the U.S. government had no official body of scientific advisors equivalent to the British Royal Society, the theories of legitimate researchers competed for public attention and official approval with the speculations of gentleman-scientists and self-proclaimed experts.

Although the word ‘science’ denoted a much more nebulous collection of ideas and activities in the early 19th Century, this ambiguity did not stop Americans from taking an intense interest in how science could be used to reshape their society. Indeed, the public’s curiosity about scientific matters had never been as great as when Poe and Reynolds were trying to bring the possibility of Antarctic exploration to its attention. As Lindsey Hursh has written, the years “between the War of 1812 and the Civil War were defined partly by the public’s insatiable desire for new information”.³⁴ In addition, she states that there existed a dominant belief “that any obstacle, no matter how impressive, could be overcome with enough knowledge and determination”.³⁵ In other words, America was watchful for an opportunity to display its native scientific genius and to demonstrate its might on the world stage.

Reynolds recognised that the conclusive breaching of the Antarctic barrier (the great ice wall which was in fact a vast frozen shelf extending from the Antarctic coastline) by an American expedition, and the potential conquest of any mysterious lands beyond it, was precisely the kind of momentous endeavour the nation was hungry for. Achieving these goals would not only change foreign attitudes to the U.S., but vitally transform the

³² Stephen Matterson, ‘Edgar Allan Poe and the orang-utan’ in Philip Coleman ed., *On Literature and Science: Essays, Reflections, Provocations* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007) p 118.

³³ Harold Beaver, ‘Introduction’ in Harold Beaver ed., *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe* (London: Penguin, 1976), p ix.

³⁴ Lindsey Hursh, ‘Curiosity’ in *Edgar Allan Poe in Context*, p 85.

³⁵ Ibid.

nation's perception of itself. William E. Lenz has argued that the enthusiasm with which the American people eventually followed Reynolds's expedition suggests that they regarded Antarctic exploration as "a symbolic act with mythic significance".³⁶ As important as scientific knowledge and greater resources were, Lenz maintains that this surge of interest in the South Polar Regions equally resulted from the fact that "in a very real sense, the discovery of the Antarctic continent promised to be the discovery of a New World, one that would cause Americans to reimagine the world".³⁷

To ensure that the public had come to share his vision of an Antarctic expedition, Reynolds won support for the project by turning it into a captivating narrative. As one who had started a prosperous newspaper in his twenties and was what David Standish calls "a natural promoter and entrepreneur",³⁸ Reynolds had an intuitive gift for presenting factual accounts in a thrilling and engrossing fashion. Even his two year sojourn in Chile following his time on the aborted Pendleton-Palmer Antarctic expedition (the exploratory voyage which some critics have credited as the original inspiration for Poe's 'MS'.³⁹) resulted in his popular memoir, *Voyage of the United States Frigate Potomac* (1835). A self-styled explorer and adventurer who had lectured to crowded auditoriums throughout the eastern states, Reynolds understood that the successful promotion of a concept as ambitious as Antarctic exploration rested as much on his skills as a storyteller as it did on the validity of the science or the political wisdom underlying it.

Reynolds's tactic was symptomatic of the intellectual climate of the age. Indeed, in the early 19th Century, realizing the entertainment value of new scientific ideas often took priority over ascertaining what practical benefits they might have. As Matterson states, this

³⁶ William E. Lenz, *The Poetics of the Antarctic: A Study in Nineteenth-Century American Cultural Perceptions* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1995), p xxviii.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ David Standish, *Hollow Earth: The Long and Curious History of Imagining Strange Lands, Fantastical Creatures, Advanced Civilizations, and Marvellous Machines Below the Earth's Surface* (Massachusetts: De Capo Press, 2007), p 82.

³⁹ Ian N. Higginson has made an interesting argument for the Pendleton-Palmer Expedition as a direct inspiration for 'MS.' in 'The First Antarctic Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe', *Polar Record* 30 (1994) p 287-98.

was a period when “the separation of science and spectacle were not absolute”.⁴⁰ On the contrary, it became a necessity for figures like Reynolds to present their scientific proposals in the manner of exciting adventure fictions. At the same time, the public’s insatiable interest in science provided a magazine writer like Poe with a steady supply of subjects to investigate both in his apparently factual articles and his stories. In this manner, Poe not only became “one of the nation’s first popular science writers”,⁴¹ in the words of John Tresch, but also produced a body of fiction which was “a repository of contemporary science”.⁴² Ingeniously playing upon the indistinct boundaries between actual scientific developments and ones which were purely imaginary yet plausible, Poe was, like Reynolds, acutely conscious of the paradoxical position of science in his culture. It is partly out of this shadowy gulf dividing extraordinary facts from the speculative unknown that Poe’s Gothic conception of the Antarctic originated.

However, it would be a mistake to perceive the variety of pseudoscientific theories which proliferated in this era (like those which Reynolds popularised to gain support for an official south polar voyage and which Poe exploited for the purposes of fact and fiction) as nothing more than elaborate forms of charlatanry. If America was to become a world power capable of achieving a goal as significant as discovering uncharted lands in the Antarctic, it was widely believed that the young nation needed to reinvent the entire discipline of science. In this sense, what Peter Swirski refers to as the state of “technological ferment”⁴³ which came about in the U.S. in Poe’s lifetime can to some extent be interpreted as a consequence of the New World’s determination to renounce what it viewed as the overly rigid, and even obsolete, models of scientific thought which it had inherited.

⁴⁰ *On Literature and Science*, p 118.

⁴¹ John Tresch, ‘Technology’ in *Edgar Allan Poe in Context*, p 374.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Peter Swirski, ‘The Heritage of Fiction Science’ in *Edgar Allan Poe in Context*, p 345.

In place of these traditional approaches, American thinkers were encouraged to bring their own uniquely romantic and poetic imaginations to bear on their scientific conjectures. Empiricism came to be viewed as an elementary process which had to be superseded by imaginative insights in order for scientists to move beyond the established limits of knowledge. In this way, Beaver describes the early 19th Century as a period in which “no neutral ground”⁴⁴ existed between science and literature. American scientists were expected to concern themselves with the great mysteries of what Poe described as “the Material and Spiritual Universe”,⁴⁵ and the more revolutionary their ideas the greater their likelihood of being enthusiastically embraced by the public. Therefore, it is clear why this form of visionary speculation came to focus itself upon that great unknown, the South Pole.

In their writings, both Poe and Reynolds advocated the view that the U.S. needed to sever its ties with the intellectual orthodoxy of the Old World and to reinvigorate scientific thought by animating it with a distinctively American imagination. Reynolds’s *Address* begins with a condensed account of the history of navigation, and he notes how at pivotal moments individual nations surged ahead of all others to make key discoveries. Reynolds then declares that America’s time has come, but states that the U.S. Antarctic expedition must be on a scale like nothing “that has been attempted by another country”⁴⁶ if it is to provide “a goodly addition to the stock of present knowledge”.⁴⁷ Appealing to his reader’s sense of patriotism, he maintains that it would be a grave error to adopt “the efforts of

⁴⁴ *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, p ix.

⁴⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, *Eureka: A Prose Poem*, in Patrick F. Quinn ed., *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales* (New York: Library of America, 1984) p 1257.

⁴⁶ *An Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition*, P71.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p 72.

other nations as models for our own”⁴⁸ for “we have always done things best, when we do them in our own way”.⁴⁹

In assessing the new approach to science America should adopt Reynolds makes a key distinction. While its benefits are undeniable, he contends that scientific research is an activity whose “utility cannot be computed in advance, but becomes apparent when the results are made known”.⁵⁰ He argues that this is “an immutable law of nature, and applies to all matters of science or invention, as well as to the process of geographical discovery”.⁵¹ To justify this view, he observes that when the great explorers set out on voyages which led to fantastic discoveries in distant lands “not one of these rewards of enterprise was anticipated, or formed an element in the calculation”⁵² when their journeys were being planned.

Reynolds suggests that the U.S. Antarctic expedition will come to rank as one of the most important voyages of discovery of all time because Americans possess a greater willingness to reckon with the unknown, a desire to go that crucial step further into mystery than any other people. In his *Address*, he upholds the belief that as long “as there is mind to act upon matter, the realm of science must be enlarged”,⁵³ and only the most presumptuous intellect would “set limits to knowledge”.⁵⁴ Consequently, he reasoned that the American contribution to science would in time become the greatest in history because of all races her citizens were equipped with the greatest imaginative capacity. In this way, Reynolds portrays the mystery of the southern *ultima Thule*, an enigma which had defied the most illustrious of European explorers, as one which only the American mind could now solve.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p 71.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p 22.

⁵¹ Ibid, p 23.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid, p70.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Poe endorsed very similar sentiments himself. Reviewing the *Report of the Committee on Naval Affairs* concerning Pacific exploration, he gives a brief outline of the history of U.S. maritime expansion and reveals how, in a century, America had transformed from a country which could only boast “of a few miserable open boats, too frail to venture far from land”⁵⁵ to one which had opened up “sources of wealth and importance”⁵⁶ in the South Seas whose value “it is at present impossible to estimate”.⁵⁷ He then states that all these achievements might come to resemble but “a dim shadow”,⁵⁸ when compared to the “mighty results”⁵⁹ which an expedition into the uncharted regions even further south could yield.

Along with Reynolds, Poe argued that in order to accomplish this the U.S. must shun established knowledge and foster the uniquely imaginative character of its own scientific geniuses. He laments that America has “followed in the rear of discovery”,⁶⁰ when by now it should have contributed “a large share to that aggregate of useful knowledge, which is the common property of all”.⁶¹ Urging the U.S. government to have confidence in the exceptional “mental elasticity”⁶² of the “eminent professors in every branch of physical science”⁶³ at its disposal, Poe called for the ushering in of a new age. For him, there could be no more ideal opportunity for the U.S. to establish its scientific credentials than by sending its finest minds on a great mission to discover those most mysterious of lands which, to use Reynolds’s phrase, had even “escaped the searching eye of Cook”.⁶⁴

⁵⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘Review of the Report of the Committee on Naval Affairs’ in *Essays and Reviews*, p 1228.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p 1232.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p 1231.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *An Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition*, p 20.

Despite the zeal with which Poe advocated an indomitable new American science and championed the cause of Reynolds's Antarctic expedition, his depiction of these elements in *Arthur Gordon Pym* could not be more different. Along with his instinct for adventure, Poe's tyro explorer Pym possesses a powerful imagination, but one with a predisposition to morbid excess. Instead of being enchanted by romantic notions of life on the ocean, Pym's only motivation is to get lost in the unknown and to experience the worst extremes of mental and physical anguish. He is led away from Nantucket by terrible "visions",⁶⁵ which in his understanding "amounted to desires",⁶⁶ culminating in the image of "an ocean unapproachable and unknown".⁶⁷ In other words, long before Pym beholds the white waters of the Antarctic he has already received "prophetic glimpses of a destiny which I felt myself in a measure bound to fulfil".⁶⁸ Equally alarming is Pym's propensity for letting a Gothic reality created by his imagination superimpose itself upon actual events. From the terrifying dreams of "[E]very species of calamity"⁶⁹ which torment him in his iron box on the 'Grampus' to the "imagined horrors"⁷⁰ which assail him as he tries to escape Tsalal, at every stage of Pym's journey his mind gives rise to vivid phantasmagorical visions.

And yet, as with so many of Poe's narrators, Pym's overwrought Gothic imagination is allied to a resolutely methodical, even hyper-rational, nature. He is consumed by the need to form logical connections and to elucidate every detail of his voyage. On board the 'Grampus', Pym faces a series of deadly phenomenological challenges (negotiating the chaos of its hold in total darkness; making sense of his friend Augustus's unfathomable warning note; wresting control of the ship from vicious

⁶⁵ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, in Quinn ed., *Poetry and Tales*, p 1018.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p 1026.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p 1170.

mutineers without weapons), and he explains the intricate processes of reasoning he uses to overcome them. Following his rescue by the 'Jane Guy', Pym persists in charting the vessel's position using conventional scientific instruments even after it enters into Antarctic regions where all concepts of time and space lose their meaning. In this way, Pym's synthesis of acute morbidity and an inflexible disposition makes him a grotesque version of the perfect amalgamation of visionary imagination and agile scientific intellect which Poe and Reynolds idealized.

After boarding the 'Jane Guy', Pym adjusts to a life of exploration and visits a series of islands in the South Atlantic and Southern Indian Oceans. He becomes a keen observer of their exotic wildlife, supplying detailed accounts of penguin colonies and albatross rookeries. For all Pym's incessant cataloguing, he remains indifferent to the practical value of the curious phenomena to be found in these isolated outposts. In contrast to Reynolds's depiction of exploration as a primarily commercial enterprise (an attitude which in Poe's novel finds its epitome in the character of Captain Guy), Pym becomes absorbed in the profound state of "reflection"⁷¹ which these bizarre creatures elicit. In this way, *Arthur Gordon Pym* depicts exploration as the full revelation of strangeness. Pym's Gothic imagination thrives on the sheer alienness of its discoveries, and his only desire is to immerse himself in the Otherness of what he experiences.

It is precisely Pym's combination of Gothic pathology and scientific curiosity which makes a voyage to the South Pole an irresistible prospect for him. Despite his preoccupation with the 'Jane Guy's' survey of the forbidding Kerguelen group and the search for the phantom Aurora islands, Pym is totally overcome by "feelings of most intense interest"⁷² when Captain Guy mentions the possibility of setting a course for the Pole, and he ceases to be able to think about anything else. Even after the ship penetrates

⁷¹ Ibid, p 1119.

⁷² Ibid, p 1129.

the Antarctic barrier and Pym finds himself on Tsalal, he remains “bent on prosecuting the voyage to the southward”⁷³ and uncovering the absolute mystery which awaits him at the Pole.

While it is Pym’s rational, scientific faculty which appears to be in control when he recognises that the ‘Jane Guy’ has an unparalleled “opportunity of solving the great problem in regard to an Antarctic continent”,⁷⁴ his gripping fascination with the Otherness of the Pole is as much a product of his gothicised view of existence. In the course of his adventures he survives living-burial, shipwreck, starvation, and living-burial once more, and on each occasion he lapses into a terrifyingly transmogrified reality. In this sense, Pym’s entire journey can be read as a progressive mapping of new, ever-more intensely strange sources of stimulation for his Gothic pathology. In Pym, the union of fear and wonder which overwhelmed actual polar explorers is overtaken by a metaphysical urge to reach the place on earth which most resembles his own abysmal imagination.

Poe intricately interposes fact and fiction throughout *Arthur Gordon Pym*, but in chapter seventeen the narrative’s relationship with actual exploration history becomes manifest. Adamant that Captain Guy will not follow the example of Cook, Weddell, Morrell, and all the pathfinders of Antarctic exploration who were forced to turn back, Pym is determined to push on and be first to the South Pole, eleven years ahead of the U.S. Exploring Expedition. His urge to reach the Antarctic Continent is so great that he again has premonitions of what he will find there. Pym possesses an inexplicable certainty that the ‘Jane Guy’ is pursuing a course which will lead to “land of some description”,⁷⁵ which is indeed what the explorers discover. Once more, it is as if Pym possesses secret

⁷³ Ibid, p 1139.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p 1134.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

knowledge of the mysterious polar realm he is doomed to journey to, long before he actually sees it.

For the original readers of *Arthur Gordon Pym*, the belief that the Polar Regions were places which might contain much more than what Francis Spufford calls an “ideal emptiness”⁷⁶ would have come as little surprise. It is proof of the wide reception and lasting influence of pseudoscientific concepts in the early 19th Century that the Antarctic controversy of the 1830s was the outcome of an even more fantastical debate two decades earlier. Indeed, the publication of Poe’s novel and the launching of the U.S. Exploring Expedition in the summer of 1838 were events which had the same unlikely inspiration. Although his ideas were dismissed by one commentator as the “wild effusions of a disordered imagination”,⁷⁷ John Cleves Symmes 1818 New Theory that “the earth is hollow and habitable within; containing a number of solid concentric spheres, one within the other”⁷⁸ was merely one of many radical pseudoscientific doctrines which circulated throughout this period.

Intrigued by the puzzling migratory patterns of animals and the presence of tropical flora and fauna along northern European coastlines and near the Arctic, the insatiable autodidact Symmes hypothesised that these things could only have travelled such vast distances by passing through the centre of the planet. Promulgating his theory by way of a national lecture tour, Symmes presented his notion that there were colossal openings at the poles leading to a number of habitable spheres inside the earth as the logical conclusion he had reached after synthesizing an enormous quantity of data taken from the fields of natural history, exploration, geography, geology, and astronomy [Fig. 10]. Such was Symmes’ conviction that his theory was correct that he chose scientific luminaries like the

⁷⁶ Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p 70.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Standish, *Hollow Earth*, p 82.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p 40.

English chemist Sir Humphry Davy and the German explorer and geographer Alexander von Humboldt (to whom Poe would later dedicate his own essay on speculative cosmology *Eureka*) to become its ‘protectors’, even though his argument clearly contradicted the most basic principles of Newtonian physics.

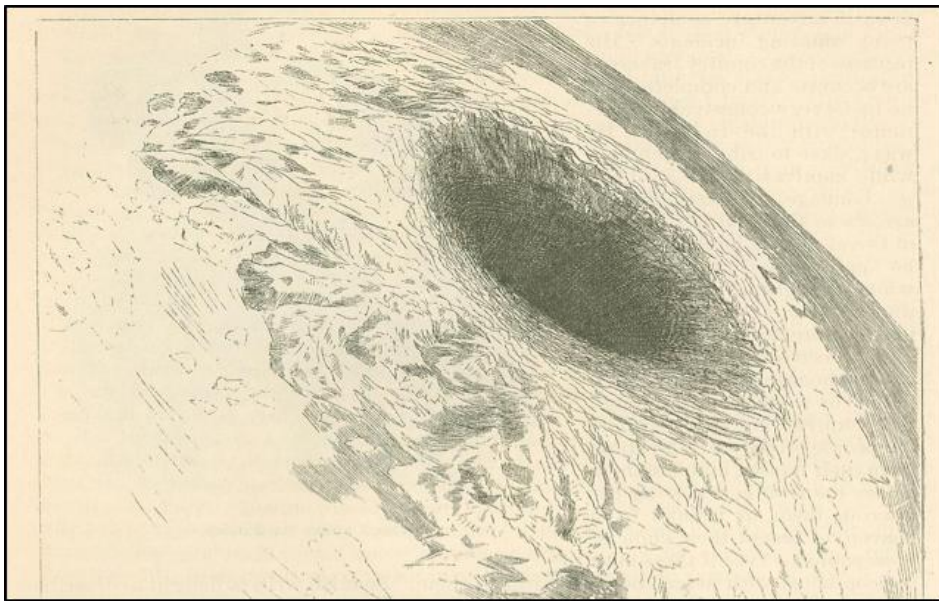


Fig. 10: Artistic rendition of Symmes’ opening at the Pole

However, the fact that Symmes’ doctrine gained considerable support attests to the American public’s enthusiasm for highly imaginative pseudoscientific speculations over traditional scientific arguments. Instead of a deluded crank, in some quarters Symmes was hailed as an iconoclastic American visionary who had shunned conventional wisdom in favour of his own idiosyncratic scientific method, which had yielded momentous results. In his time, the ‘Holes at the Poles’ theory of this “frontier philosopher”,⁷⁹ to use Duane A. Griffin’s term, was debated in Congress and won the approval of eminent figures, some of whom spoke of Symmes as a successor to both Newton and Columbus. Moreover, for all

⁷⁹ Duane A. Griffin, ‘Hollow and Habitable Within: Symmes’s Theory of Earth’s Internal Structure and Polar Geography’, *Physical Geography*, 2005, Vol. 25, No. 5, p 388.

its fancifulness Symmes' doctrine had the distinction of being the first comprehensive theory of geophysical structure proposed by an American, and it fostered a powerful sentiment of nationalist aspiration which, thanks to Reynolds, eventually took the form of America's first ever expressly scientific endeavour.

Aside from its arresting imaginativeness, there were two further reasons why Symmes' doctrine of a hollow earth acquired such currency. First of all, as with much of the pseudoscience of the time Symmes' New Theory not only embraced a massive variety of different phenomena but also promised many more astounding discoveries to come. Ignoring or incorporating established scientific principles on the basis of how easily they could be made to support his doctrine, Symmes tried to convert the American people not by making any central scientific argument but by simply showing that he had developed a theory sufficiently enormous in scope that it united all of the heterogeneous observations he had amassed.

Secondly, Symmes' New Theory was so fantastic that it led to wide disagreement, which inevitably increased its fame. The fact that his idea of a hollow earth was obviously unscientific and yet uncannily able to explain so much that was mysterious about the natural world (and about the Polar Regions in particular), meant that it became the duty of actual scientists to explain why it was an impossibility. Indeed, the first published account of *Symmes's Theory of Concentric Spheres* (1826), written by James McBride, even contains what can be read as a veiled admission that the New Theory might be refuted, but also the concomitant idea that this very process would be of lasting importance for science. McBride writes that the true purpose of his work is to "attract the attention of the learned, who are in the habit of indulging in more abstruse researches in the operation and effect of natural causes; and should it be found to merit the attention of such, it is hoped their enquiries may be so directed as to accelerate the march of scientific improvement, enlarge

the field of philosophic speculation, and open the world to new objects of ambition and enterprise”.⁸⁰

The object which Symmes’ doctrine ultimately focused America’s ambitions upon was the Antarctic. While the idea of a warm and iceless polar sea with a temperate landmass beyond it was not original to Symmes, his belief that inside the earth was a “rich land, stocked with thrifty vegetables and animals, if not men”⁸¹ was surely unlike anything most Americans had even dreamed of. As chapter one has shown, the concept that the globe contained habitable interior spaces which could be reached by way of the Polar Regions had recurred throughout the centuries. Symmes’ modified version of this theory coincided with first the expedition to find the Northwest Passage in forty years, a voyage which returned the public’s attention to the Poles. Furthermore, no previous hollow earth exponent had suggested that such a hypothesis could be verified. Symmes called for the immediate assembly of an exploration party to do precisely that.

It was the sheer immensity and audacity of Symmes’ claim which resulted not only in America’s interest in the South Pole and the formation of the U.S. Exploring Expedition but also in Poe’s fictions of Antarctic voyages. The perception of the Polar Regions as unearthly places set apart from the rest of the natural world and points of egress to a different reality had persisted since antiquity. Symmes’ New Theory adapted the ancient notion that these regions were a kind of portal with his own concept of the verge, the intermediate space which lies between the outer and inner worlds. However, Symmes’ depiction of the polar verge was more monumental than any before. He held that at the Arctic was a vast opening which could provide safe passage into the earth’s interior for whole fleets of ships and legions of American colonists.

⁸⁰ Quoted in *Edgar Allan Poe in Context*, p 65.

⁸¹ Quoted in *Standish, Hollow Earth*, p 41.

With his vision of a multitude of inner worlds and countless new continents, Symmes turned the project of exploration on its head. Instead of a planet whose unmapped regions were dwindling, he maintained that its natural wonders had barely begun to be uncovered. Hester Blum notes that the “image of a distant polar world”⁸² Symmes projected was so “evocative”⁸³ that it “stayed in circulation through literary and commercial interest in polar voyaging”⁸⁴ until the 1870s. It came to haunt Reynolds, frustrating his efforts to get the Antarctic voyage he proposed taken seriously and finally costing him his place on the U.S. Exploring Expedition. Certainly, the fact that Poe wrote four works within eight years (‘MS. Found in a Bottle’ (1833), ‘The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall’ (1835), *Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), and ‘A Descent into the Maelström’ (1841)), which all partake of the imagery of the Symmes’ Hole proves that it had more than a fleeting hold on the public imagination, and upon his own.

While it is unlikely that many Americans became convinced that the Polar Regions concealed massive vortices providing access to inhabited worlds inside the earth, Symmes’ ideas could not have failed to alert them to the still unsolved mystery of the Antarctic. Following closely upon the controversy created by the New Theory came the exciting reports that a feat previously thought impossible had been achieved. Whaling captains James Weddell and Benjamin Morrell had sailed three degrees beyond Cook’s *ne plus ultra* and maintained that, had they persisted, they could have reached the Pole. Instead of the enormous white void it had remained for half a century, the combination of Symmes’ theory and the claims of Weddell and Morrell meant that, in Poe’s words, the “public

⁸² Hester Blum, ‘John Cleves Symmes and the Planetary Reach of Polar Exploration’, *American Literature*, June 2012, Vol. 84, No. 2, p 251.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

mind”⁸⁵ was once again “thoroughly alive on the subject”⁸⁶ of what was to be found in the extreme southern latitudes.

Initially one of Symmes’ disciples, Reynolds seized upon the curiosity Symmes’ theory attracted to launch his campaign for an Antarctic expedition. In doing so, he called upon the public to accept an idea of U.S. expansion into the far south which, in the words of Gretchen Murphy, was “both mental and territorial”.⁸⁷ Not only did the American people have to believe that the Southern Ocean could be navigated, they also had to envisage themselves colonising whatever strange, unseen lands existed on the far side of it. With the impending mobilization of the Exploring Expedition, the speculative space of the Antarctic, the fertile breeding-ground for pseudoscientific ideas like a warm southern sea and the Symmes Hole looked set to finally give up its secrets.

Poe, constantly on the lookout for subjects to use as a basis for fiction, must have recognised that the fantastical notions attached to the South Polar Regions derived from their mysterious remoteness, and that while they remained unexplored there was scope for work which could make the most of this intriguing uncertainty. As a realm whose elusiveness had inspired a wealth of conjecture, the Antarctic encapsulated the divide between the known and the unknown and the borderland between reality and the imagination, the very gothic fringe territory Poe mapped in his writings. Poe’s sophisticated scientific knowledge would have been more than sufficient to convince him that Symmes’ ideas were preposterous. However, he evidently appreciated their imaginative mystique and sensational appeal. In other words, instead of being an author

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ *Essays and Reviews*, p 1235.

⁸⁷ Gretchen Murphy, ‘Symzonia, Typee, and the Dream of U.S. Global Isolation’, *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, 2003, Vol. 49, No. 4, p 259.

“obsessed”⁸⁸ by “Antarctic fantasies”,⁸⁹ as Beaver has suggested, it is more reasonable to suppose that Poe hoped to turn the *cause célèbre* surrounding the possible verification of Symmes’ theory by the U.S. Exploring Expedition into an opportunity to write a profitable fiction.

Thanks to Symmes and Reynolds, America’s fascination with the mystery of the Poles had reached new heights. Desperate to ensure that his novel would have a wide appeal, for Poe the temptation to produce a fictionalised account of the nation’s inaugural voyage of discovery, the greatest exploration story of his day, must have proven irresistible. A quest to reach the most inaccessible place on the globe, the theme of *Arthur Gordon Pym* must have seemed bound to enthrall readers. It also lent itself perfectly to the kind of intense, verisimilar fabrication which Poe (who believed that a work of true genius must be “a great invention”⁹⁰ above all else) excelled at. Since the Poles remained untouched, in the words of David Standish they offered “complete artistic freedom, a tabula rasa on which anything could be written”.⁹¹ As none of his readers had set eyes on the regions the book would describe, Poe was able to romanticize them without restraint and conjure up the travel journal of an Antarctic explorer who had already uncovered the South Pole’s terrifying secret.

If Poe had any doubts that a polar voyage could be engrossing material for a sustained narrative it is probable that these were overcome by his familiarity with ‘Captain Adam Seaborn’’s *Symzonia: Voyage of Discovery* (1820), a novel which received little attention in its day but almost certainly had a guiding influence on *Arthur Gordon Pym*. Another work which blends credible scientific detail with vivid fantasy, *Symzonia* also defies generic categorisation. Indeed, the uncertainty about how it should be read has given

⁸⁸ Harold Beaver, ‘Introduction’ to Harold Beaver ed., *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (London: Penguin, 1975), p 15.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘Review of *Tales* by Edgar A. Poe’, in *Essays and Reviews*, p 869.

⁹¹ *Hollow Earth*, p 94.

rise to a critical debate almost as tangled as the one which surrounds *Arthur Gordon Pym*. Continually attributed to Symmes himself, *Symzonia* was long misinterpreted as his own failed bid to use fiction to publicise his theory.

Although the real author of *Symzonia* has never been conclusively identified, recent critical analyses⁹² have demonstrated that the novel is a deceptively subtle work whose improbable plot should not obscure the originality of its themes or its skilful engagement with the contemporary debate over exploration. First of all, it is an extremely early example of American sea fiction, predating the maritime novels of James Fenimore Cooper. Secondly, like *Arthur Gordon Pym*, *Symzonia* is a distinctly American tale of an adventure into the unknown. Captain Seaborn sets out to claim a new territory for the U.S., but his destination is not some western wilderness but “a new and untried world”⁹³ within the earth. Finally, *Symzonia* locates the portal to this realm at the Antarctic.

Captain Seaborn relates how, with his soul “fired with the true spirit of discovery”⁹⁴, he became determined to “open the way to new fields for the enterprise of my fellow-citizens”.⁹⁵ In this respect, he is an American equivalent of a combination of Columbus, Cook and those explorers who sought the fabled Northwest Passage. However, Seaborn never provides any justification for his certainty that the furthest extremity of the Southern Ocean must be warm or that the planet’s interior can sustain life. Like his hero Symmes, Seaborn subscribes to a vision of creation governed by a form of divine providence, according to which the notion of a space not specifically adapted for man’s benefit is simply impossible. As the reading of the closing chapter of *Arthur Gordon Pym* will show,

⁹² Hester Blum’s ‘John Cleves Symmes and the Planetary Reach of Polar Exploration’, Gretchen Murphy’s ‘Symzonia, Typee, and the Dream of U.S. Global Isolation’, and Johan Wijkmark’s “‘One of the Most Intensely Exciting Secrets’: The Antarctic in American Literature, 1820-1849’ (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Karlstad University Studies, 2009), all offer readings of *Symzonia* which expose its many levels of subtle political satire.

⁹³ Captain Adam Seaborn (Pseud.) *Symzonia: Voyage of Discovery* (New York: J. Seymour, 1820), p 13. [Online] Retrieved from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/earth/sym/sym00.htm>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p 14.

Poe's Gothic lands at the Antarctic are the exact reverse of this, and are characterised by an unspeakable strangeness which prevents their integration with the rest of the planet.

Even though *Symzonia* was published before Reynolds began lobbying for an Antarctic expedition, the philosophy of exploration Seaborn espouses matches the progressive, expansionist ideals Reynolds promoted. This polar voyage is the quest for knowledge Symmes campaigned for, as well as the search for plentiful new hunting grounds which Reynolds presented as the venture's economic rationale. In this way, *Symzonia* accurately predicts the combination of intellectual curiosity and commercial interest which came together to launch the Exploring Expedition. Furthermore, Seaborn maintains that exploration is vital if humanity is to achieve its inherent potential. As he explains, the "state of the civilized world, and the growing evidences of the perfectibility of the human mind, seemed to indicate the necessity of a more extended sphere of action".⁹⁶

Reflecting the growing awareness that American mariners were, in Poe's words, "reaping a rich harvest of individual wealth and national honour in these vast regions"⁹⁷ above and below the Antarctic Circle, *Symzonia* contradicts Symmes' view that the Arctic was the logical destination for an American scientific voyage. Setting his sights on the South Pole, Seaborn observes that "I felt perfectly satisfied that I had only to find an opening in the 'icy hoop', through which I could dash with my vessel, to discover a region where seals could be taken as fast as they could be stripped and cured".⁹⁸ Indeed, Seaborn not only convincingly proposes the Antarctic as a worthy objective for U.S. exploration but also contends, again anticipating Reynolds, that America must lay claim to any lands at the extreme south if she is to become a leading imperial nation. America's first master explorer, Seaborn states that the conquest of the Pole shall "secure to my name a

⁹⁶ Ibid, p 13/14.

⁹⁷ *Essays and Reviews*, p 1227.

⁹⁸ *Symzonia*, p 30.

conspicuous and imperishable place on the tablet of History, and a niche of the first order in the temple of fame”,⁹⁹ and earn a similar distinction for his native land.

Once he has located the new world inside the planet, Seaborn discovers that human perfection was already achieved millennia ago. He meets the radiantly white-skinned Symzonians, who are the embodiment of reason, moderation and virtue. These identical and ageless Internals are the citizens of a utopian civilization which is completely harmonious, and has had no contact with another race for thousands of years. Symzonia is a place where democratic values have been upheld for aeons, and yet this total stability seems not to have led to stagnation. In this respect, what this pastoral paradise appears to represent is an idealised version of the early American republic.

Symzonia has been described as the first ever American utopian novel, but it deviates significantly from the majority of utopian fictions which, according to Alcena Madelaine Davis Rogan, describe imaginary worlds “that refer to their contemporary historical moments by positing corrective versions of existing religious, property, gender, and/or political relations”.¹⁰⁰ The Internals only maintain their absolute harmony by expelling those who differ even slightly from the social ideal. All beings living on the earth’s exterior are the degenerate descendants of those banished from Symzonia. The novel therefore puts forward the paradoxical idea that to penetrate the Antarctic, a feat which in an important sense represented the culmination of one phase of mankind’s search for knowledge, is to also return to the very point of origin of all human life. To move forward beyond the edge of all known reality is to simultaneously move back to the primordial beginning of things, a theme which recurs in *Arthur Gordon Pym* and is integral to all of the other works of Antarctic gothic fiction this thesis shall examine.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p 97/98.

¹⁰⁰ Alcena Madelaine Davis Rogan, ‘Utopian Studies’ in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint ed., *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2009) p 309.

While not a work of Gothic fiction, *Symzonia*'s fantasy of Antarctic exploration includes one uncanny element which became central to *Arthur Gordon Pym*. After thousands of years on the surface, the corruption of the exiled Externals has become reflected in the darkness of their skin. Captain Seaborn considers himself one of the most advanced members of his race, but is overcome by a "truly mortifying"¹⁰¹ sensation on making first contact with the Internals. Faced with their glowing whiteness, he experiences a moment of Gothic self-estrangement as he beholds his own "dark and hideous appearance"¹⁰² and notices how his pale skin (which he "thought to be one of the finest and whitest"¹⁰³ of its kind) now resembles that of "the sootiest African".¹⁰⁴ In this way, what *Symzonia*'s voyage to lands beyond the Pole ultimately exposes is the Gothic primitivism concealed within human nature.

This connection between speculative theories about the Poles and pseudoscientific ideas of race, one which so heavily informs *Symzonia*, *Arthur Gordon Pym*, as well as later Antarctic Gothic fictions, was not accidental. As noted earlier, the belief that hot climates existed at the Poles was one which exploration accounts frequently appeared to verify. Sir John Ross had returned from his Arctic voyage of 1818 with descriptions of the Inuit he had met on Baffin Island, dark-skinned men inexplicably living in the white wastes of the most distant northern regions. As *Symzonia* attests, Symmes had identified these "swarthy"¹⁰⁵ people as "stragglers from the extreme north part of the internal regions".¹⁰⁶ If such beings were to be found on the fringe of the Polar Regions, what strange creatures might be met with at the Pole itself? In this way, the combination of *Symzonia* and the pseudoscientific doctrine which inspired it may have led Poe to envisage the Antarctic as a

¹⁰¹ *Symzonia*, p 110.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p 107.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p 110.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p 108.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p 104.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

setting for an encounter between man and the myriad forms of a terrifying and destabilising Otherness.

In *Symzonia*, the penetration of the South Pole is merely a sensational framing device for its satirical critique of the ideology which promoted ceaseless expansion as the means by which man would overcome his atavistic limitations. In Poe's novel, the expedition to the Antarctic becomes a conceptual journey, a treacherous ontological odyssey to a Gothic space outside of all known reality. As Patrick F. Quinn has noted, "Unlike the classic imaginary voyages of literature, in which the ocean exists only to be traversed as quickly as possible so that some utopia may take shape for the political and social edification of the reader, the imaginary voyage of Gordon Pym has no definable goal in terms of conscious human life".¹⁰⁷ Instead, Pym's imaginative quest is of an altogether different order: it is an attempt to reveal the boundless Otherness which surrounds the sphere of human interpretation, the "vast chain of apparent miracles"¹⁰⁸ in which Pym finds himself "at length encircled"¹⁰⁹ as he moves ever closer to the Pole.

It was from *Symzonia* that Poe appropriated the symbolic dualism of black and white which comes to dominate his novel and is essential to its formulation of Gothic horror. At the same time, in *Arthur Gordon Pym* this thematic polarity is recast in a much more complex fashion. In *Symzonia*, blackness acts as the figuration of corruption, avarice and barbarity, while the sacred whiteness of the earth's interior epitomises morality, wisdom, and purity. Poe initially seems to follow this dichotomy, conjuring up a dark sea containing the nightmarish black Antarctic island of Tsalal and its entirely black inhabitants. These beings, who prove to be "among the most barbarous, subtle, and bloodthirsty wretches that ever contaminated the face of the globe",¹¹⁰ possess a frenzied

¹⁰⁷ Patrick F. Quinn, 'Poe's Imaginary Voyage', *The Hudson Review*, Winter 1952, Vol. 4, No. 4, p 574.

¹⁰⁸ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1141.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 1150.

hatred of all things white, leading them to destroy the vessel of discovery 'Jane Guy' and most of its crew.

Poe's overwhelmingly negative portrayal of the Tsalalians has frequently been invoked as damning evidence that his representations of non-white people are racist caricatures which pandered to the sympathies of the slave-owning elite which made up his readership¹¹¹. Furthermore, they have been interpreted as proof of his own prejudiced views concerning race, which Paul Christian Jones has summarised as "a conviction of the necessity (if not the justice) of the institution of slavery, and a belief in white racial superiority over the black underclass".¹¹² The mass butchery of the white explorers on Tsalal in *Arthur Gordon Pym* certainly appears to uphold what Jones has described as the era's "racist and proslavery ideology,"¹¹³ which promoted the idea that to trust or befriend non-white people was a mistake and that brutal measures were necessary to prevent them from staging a revolt.

Given that Toni Morrison has stated that "[n]o early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism than Poe,"¹¹⁴ it is easy to dismiss his Antarctic Gothic novel as a crude, reactionary and dangerous racialist fantasy. However, as Morrison herself has shown, the matter is more complex. She argues that *Arthur Gordon Pym* is a work in which "Africanism is used to conduct a dialogue concerning American space"¹¹⁵: Using this tribe of mysterious Others, "Poe meditates on place as a means of containing the fear of borderlessness and trespass, but also as a means of releasing and exploring the desire for a limitless empty frontier."¹¹⁶ Therefore, she holds that in Poe's

¹¹¹ For a range of critical interpretations of Poe's representations of race, see J. Gerald Kennedy and Liliane Weissberg ed. *Romancing the Shadow: Poe and Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹¹² Paul Christian Jones, 'Slavery and Abolitionism' in Kevin J. Hayes, ed. *Edgar Allan Poe in Context*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) p138.

¹¹³ Ibid, p 139.

¹¹⁴ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (London: Picador, 1993), p 32.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p 151.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

text, like much of the imaginative literature of the period, figurations of race possess a self-reflexive quality. As Morrison observes, in these works “images of blackness can be evil and protective, rebellious and forgiving, fearful and desirable.”¹¹⁷

In spite of the racist stance which Poe outwardly seems to affirm, Dana D. Nelson has also posited that *Arthur Gordon Pym* is notable for the way in which it succeeds in decoding such attitudes. In her opinion, what the novel depicts is “the general failure of Pym and his colonial epistemology to represent Otherness.”¹¹⁸ Pym quickly reaches one set of conclusions about the nature of the Tsalalians (ie. that they are a simple, peaceful people who pose no threat), but this proves to be completely inaccurate. Composed at a time when American explorers were setting out for unseen lands in the Pacific and making contact with new cultures [Fig. 11], Nelson argues that Poe’s text undermines many of the assumptions which this enterprise was founded upon. In her words, it is a work which “reveals the terminal instability of colonial knowledge and identity”¹¹⁹ and also “lays bare the repressive means through which colonial subjectivity and authority operate.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p 59.

¹¹⁸ Dana D. Nelson, *The World in Black and White: Reading ‘Race’ in American Literature 1638-1867* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p 101.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

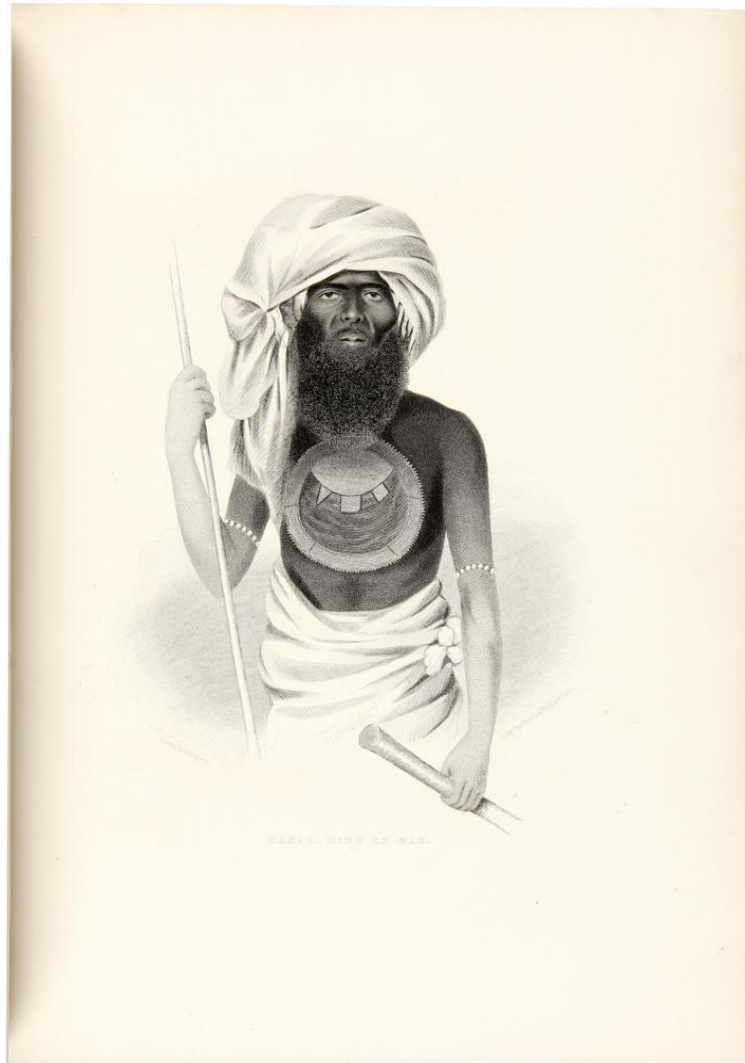


Fig. 11: Portrait of a native of the Sulu Archipelago, Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition* (1844)

Both Morrison and Nelson maintain that Poe's disruption of traditional forms of racial representation rests upon the ambiguous role of whiteness in Pym's narrative. Nelson notes that the novel's far southern realm "contains both light and darkness, white and shade,"¹²¹ qualities which are "meaningless without comparison to the other."¹²² However, their relationship is more than a matter of simple binary difference. The blackness of the Tsalalians may signify danger and deceit, but Pym then enters a region

¹²¹ Ibid, p 106.

¹²² Ibid.

dominated by a whiteness which Morrison has described as “mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtained, dreaded, senseless [and] implacable.”¹²³ By the climax of *Arthur Gordon Pym*, the horrors of Tsalal’s absolute darkness have been eclipsed by the sense of mystification evoked by the supernal, radiant whiteness of the polar void, a realm without any correspondence to the world Pym has left behind.

Along with its puzzling alternation of black and white, the other key element of *Arthur Gordon Pym*’s formulation of the Antarctic Gothic can be traced to its engagement with *Symzonia*. This is its depiction of the South Polar Regions as the realm where the explorer can come closest to uncovering the fundamental truths of existence. Out of Symmes’s fanciful theory of the planet’s formation *Symzonia* develops a mythological vision of mankind’s origins. In *Arthur Gordon Pym* Poe surpasses this by introducing a series of intriguing plot devices which hint that those who travel to the South Pole may receive nothing less than an imminent revelation of the Almighty’s ultimate purpose for creation.

From the regularly shaped chasms which seem to form words to the symbolic characters possibly derived from ancient languages, Poe intimates that inscribed within the very landscape of the Antarctic island of Tsalal is some kind of eschatological knowledge. When Pym then makes his way to the Polar shroud, the very fabric of reality grows indistinct and he constantly seems on the verge of receiving some variety of wondrous knowledge about what lies “beyond the veil”¹²⁴ of phenomenal appearances. In other words, the “most intensely exciting”¹²⁵ secret that this polar voyage promises to reveal is the key to the mystical riddle of existence itself.

¹²³ *Playing in the Dark*, p 59.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p 1179.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p 1134.

To conclude this section, the “wide and desolate Antarctic Ocean”¹²⁶ of *Arthur Gordon Pym*’s final chapter is a realm where any kind of scientific intellect, even the visionary kind exalted by Poe and Reynolds, would falter. Here all of the categorical distinctions (black and white, dreams and nightmares, real and imaginary, natural and unnatural, possible and impossible) whose meaning Pym has struggled to maintain are suddenly abolished. At last in a space whose spectacular strangeness surpasses the most vivid extravagancies of his Gothic imagination, all Pym’s mind can do is numbly record its spiralling wonders. As the site where Pym can no longer be sure of his perceptions, Poe fittingly characterises the Pole as a “limitless”¹²⁷ cataract drawing in everything around it. *Symzonia* may have depicted a portal leading to an interior world, but what appears before Pym is an image of reality itself consumed in a state of endless flux.

Although Poe may well have entertained bright hopes that the U.S. Exploring Expedition would be the vanguard of a glorious new era of American science and exploration, his phantasmagorical rendition of a polar voyage leaves the reader lost in an Antarctica where all natural laws destabilise and human experience gives way to a new order of Gothic perception. *Arthur Gordon Pym* exploits the same intriguing uncertainty surrounding the South Polar Regions which Jeremiah Reynolds had used to encourage interest in an Antarctic expedition. However, instead of depicting them as the place where American imperial ambitions would be fulfilled, in *Arthur Gordon Pym* these regions are only the centre of an ever-deepening mystery. Poe’s South Pole is a place which poses the ultimate challenge to the human mind, and to explore it is to enter into a world of the unnatural.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p 1175.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p 1179.

Section 2: “Oh, Horror Upon Horror!”:¹²⁸ *Arthur Gordon Pym*, Maritime Romances, and Gothic Polar Voyage Narratives.

Although it was the sense of wondrous possibility which resulted from Symmes’ New Theory and the impending launch of the U.S. Exploring Expedition which provided Poe with his immediate impetus for writing *Arthur Gordon Pym*, the novel’s depiction of a voyage to unearthly Polar Regions was also the result of a curious synthesis of literary forms. By merging the conventions of popular sea adventure tales with the techniques of sensational magazine stories, the sublime terror expressed in Romantic poetry, and imaginative concepts from earlier works of fantasy, Poe offered up a vision of the Antarctic as a place of unique metaphysical awe and dread. As this section shall demonstrate, it is Poe’s incorporation and adaptation of a variety of literary models which also gives *Arthur Gordon Pym*’s formulation of the Antarctic Gothic its profoundly disturbing power.

When Poe began writing short fiction in the early 1830s one of the most avidly sought after literary genres was the maritime romance. The sea’s tremendous potency as a source of inspiration for American authors was matched by the overwhelming excitement which the theme of life on the ocean could stir in their readers. As America began the process of establishing its identity, the image of the dynamic seafarer boldly setting out in search of new territories for his homeland was one which readers responded to with exceptional enthusiasm. In this way, sea fiction became an ideal means of articulating the patriotic and imperialist sentiments associated with Manifest Destiny. It became an essential component of American culture so early on that Tony Tanner has even argued

¹²⁸ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘MS. Found in a Bottle’ in Quinn, ed., *Poetry and Tales*, p 199.

that “it was American writers who effectively invented, and developed, the sea-story as a separate and recognisable genre”.¹²⁹

James Fenimore Cooper pioneered the maritime romance in the 1820s when he produced the first of his sea adventure tales, including *The Pilot* (1824) and *The Red Rover* (1827). Cooper developed a simple and satisfying formula for these works, and their enormous popularity led the way for a horde of imitators and prompted a boom in indigenous nautical fiction. Thanks to Cooper, maritime romances became not just a respectable form of escapism for members of every class but also a highly fashionable one. The nation’s increasing mobilisation as a naval power only quickened American reader’s consumption of sea stories, both fictional and non-fictional. In Poe’s lifetime Cooper became America’s most celebrated author, while such maritime memoirs as Benjamin Morrell’s *Narrative of Four Voyages* (1832) and Richard Henry Dana’s *Two Years before the Mast* (1840) went through many editions.

It is clear that Poe quickly recognised the reading public’s keen appetite for nautical tales of every kind. In 1832 he adopted this fictional mode for the first time, producing one of his most acclaimed and widely-reprinted stories. ‘MS. Found in a Bottle’ depicts a gothic voyage into the uncharted waters of the South Seas and onward to the South Pole, and this strange marriage of seafaring romance, mariner’s legend, and pseudoscientific theory won Poe his first literary prize. Almost ten years later he used a similar combination of materials to equally fantastical effect in ‘A Descent into the Maelström’ (1841). However, the most obvious indication that Poe was conscious of sea fiction’s high value in the literary marketplace was his decision to make *Arthur Gordon Pym* a maritime adventure narrative.

¹²⁹ Tony Tanner, ed., *The Oxford Book of Sea Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p xvii.

While its last eight chapters contain much that is outlandish and bizarre, *Arthur Gordon Pym* possesses enough of the archetypal features of sea fiction to constitute a legitimate entry in the genre. Indeed, in 1950 W.H. Auden went so far as to call it “one of the finest sea stories ever written”,¹³⁰ and “an object lesson in the art”¹³¹ of the maritime adventure novel. Certainly, when the first two instalments of *Arthur Gordon Pym* were published in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, the work was given the unambiguous subtitle, ‘A Sea Story’. In a period in which readers were, to use the words of William E. Lenz, “suspicious of fiction yet hungry for wonders”,¹³² Poe’s spectacular combination of seafaring tale and fantasy must have seemed the perfect formula for a bestseller. ‘MS.’ had been much admired for what one contemporary critic had termed its combination of “wild, vigorous and poetical imagination, a rich style, a fertile invention, and varied and curious learning”.¹³³ Just as a vast number of readers had enjoyed this ingenious transmogrification of a thrilling sea fiction, so Poe must have calculated that *Arthur Gordon Pym* would prove an even greater sensation.

Moreover, Poe intended *Arthur Gordon Pym* to act as a compendium of many different forms of sea story. Cooper may have been the writer who, in Tanner’s words, made the maritime romance into a “distinctively American genre”,¹³⁴ but his novels represented the most traditional end of an enormously varied spectrum of literature which would eventually include some of the great masterpieces of the American imagination, above all the works of Herman Melville. In the U.S., sea fiction developed so rapidly that when Poe wrote his first short stories it had already given rise to a number of distinct sub-

¹³⁰ W.H. Auden, ‘Introduction to Edgar Allan Poe’ in Eric W. Carlson ed., *The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism since 1829* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1970) p 222.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² William E. Lenz, ‘Narratives of Exploration, Sea Fiction, Mariners’ Chronicles, and the Rise of American Nationalism: “To Cast Anchor on that Point Where All Meridians Terminate,”’ *American Studies*, 1991, Vol. 10, No. 1, p 45.

¹³³ ‘Decision of the Judges for Poe’s “MS. Found in a Bottle”’ in Graham Clarke ed., *Edgar Allan Poe: Critical Assessments Vol. 2: Poe in the 19th Century* (Sussex: Helm Information, 1991), p 54.

¹³⁴ *The Oxford Book of Sea Stories*, p xvii.

genres. These included sentimental stories of ocean-going life, tragic accounts of shipwrecks, and exotic tales of seafaring adventure. Poe ensured that each of these sub-genres was represented by a different episode of his narrative, from Pym's disastrous midnight frolic aboard the 'Ariel', to the bloody mutiny on the 'Grampus' with its overtones of piracy followed by the ship's destruction in a storm, to the expedition to a strangely distorted South Sea island, in order to give it the greatest commercial potential.

Even though Poe's novel is a textual hybrid encompassing many forms of sea-fiction, its relationship with these modes transcends simple imitation. In 1932 Jorge Luis Borges observed that *Arthur Gordon Pym* was a work with "two plots",¹³⁵ one a "high seas adventure"¹³⁶ and another "inexorable and secretive"¹³⁷ one which reveals itself as the narrative unfolds. A tale which begins in the manner of a formulaic seafaring romance when the impetuous youth departs Nantucket by stowing away on a whaling ship bound for the South Seas, *Arthur Gordon Pym* undergoes a dramatic stylistic shift, ending up in a weird realm of monsters, mystifying symbols, and fantastical visions. The terrible ordeals which Pym endures in its earlier stages (excruciating thirst and hunger, atrocious violence, shipwreck, cannibalism), all of which would have been familiar material for readers of more sensational forms of sea fiction, are gradually overtaken by Pym's perilous quest to encounter the terrifying strangeness which quotidian reality has shielded him from.

Poe brings about this thematic transformation through a subtle reconfiguration of one of the most pervasive sub-genres of sea fiction. Despite the progressive ethos of the age, the Gothic or supernatural sea story remained one of the most popular forms of maritime tale in early 19th Century America. Cooper had criticized what he saw as the morbid excesses of earlier authors like Charles Brockden Brown, and deliberately depicted

¹³⁵ Jorge Luis Borges, 'Narrative Art and Magic' in *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986* (London: Penguin, 2000) p 80.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

the ocean as an arena for healthy, patriotic adventure. However, as Tanner notes, the writers who came after Cooper “wrote very differently of the sea and the men on it – more darkly, more frighteningly, more metaphysically, more psychologically, more pessimistically, [and] more fantastically”.¹³⁸ American authors soon followed the example of the British Romantic poets and Gothic novelists, such as Lord Byron, Mary Shelley and Sir Walter Scott, who, in works like *The Corsair* (1814), *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1818), *Frankenstein* (1818), and *The Pirate* (1822), had made allegorical use of nautical imagery and embraced the theme of life on the sea as a symbol of man's essential isolation in a chaotic, often malevolent universe.¹³⁹

It is from the Gothic sea story that *Arthur Gordon Pym's* style and content primarily derive. Frederick S. Frank has argued that Poe's novel is a text which mirrors its own “hyperbolic literary, cultural, and historical context”.¹⁴⁰ In this tumultuous period there were few things more certain to satisfy the majority of American readers than an exciting seafaring story tinged with horror and intimations of the supernatural, and on one level what Poe wrote was another nautical tale full of mystery and suspense. At the same time, Poe's close familiarity with the Romantics, especially Byron and Coleridge, must have led him to recognise that Gothic maritime tales could also be the basis for truly original works of the imagination. In this way, the tremendous popularity and endless metaphorical richness of Gothic sea stories explain why Poe adopted this literary mode first in ‘MS.’ and then for his novel five years later.

On the surface, the first two thirds of *Arthur Gordon Pym* appears to belong in the traditional territory of maritime adventure fiction, and presents a sequence of thrilling incidents full of the bravery quintessential to Cooper's sea-stories. However, moments of

¹³⁸ *The Oxford Book of Sea Stories*, p xvii.

¹³⁹ For an analysis of the origins of sea fiction, see Philip Edwards, *Sea Mark: Metaphorical Voyage, Spenser to Milton* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁰ Frederick S. Frank, ‘Introduction’ to Frederick S. Frank and Diane Long Hoeveler ed., *Edgar Allan Poe, The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (Ontario: Broadview Editions, 2010), p 11.

appalling Gothic horror constantly erupt through this facade, disrupting Pym's sense of reality as well as the reader's perceptions about the nature of the text itself. Having granted his protagonist the limitless freedom of the ocean, Poe entraps Pym within his coffin-like box inside the hold of the 'Grampus' whose airless conditions lead him to experience nightmarish delusions. Shortly thereafter Pym discovers Tiger, his beloved dog, who then undergoes a hideous transformation and nearly devours Pym. The ship has barely set sail when a mutiny breaks out, resulting in the gruesome murder of most of the crew. When the 'Grampus' is wrecked, Pym and the other survivors give way to the animalistic aspect of their nature when they resort to devouring a luckless sailor.

Poe borrowed the harrowing details of these incidents from a variety of publications, such as the factual accounts of seafaring calamities collected in Archibald Duncan's immensely popular *Mariner's Chronicles* (1804-05) and R. Thomas's catalogue of allegedly authentic maritime tragedies, *Remarkable Shipwrecks* (1813). More significantly, he also drew upon a distinguished publication which was already well known to him. The primary models for many of Poe's most famous Gothic tales,¹⁴¹ the short fictions which appeared in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* often included grisly nautical narratives. Disturbing sea stories like John Howison's 'The Floating Beacon' (1821), with its scenes of drowning and shipwreck, and Michael Scott's 'Heat and Thirst, - A Scene in Jamaica' (1830), which features the discovery of a lost ship and her putrefying passengers, were among the sources of inspiration for *Arthur Gordon Pym's* ghastlier episodes of Gothic horror.

However, such scenes were not all Poe appropriated from *Blackwood's*. It was this publication's distinctive approach to the tale of sensation which may have provided him

¹⁴¹ Bruce Weiner has argued that *Arthur Gordon Pym's* lack of thematic unity means that the novel is best understood as constituting a series of *Blackwood's*-style episodes. See Bruce Weiner, 'Novels, Tales and Problems of Form in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*' in Richard Kopley ed. *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), p 44-57.

with the basis for the overwhelming metaphysical terror which underlies *Arthur Gordon Pym*'s formulation of the Antarctic Gothic. The typical *Blackwood's* tale took the form of a first-person recollection of an outrageously horrendous incident, and relied upon the alternation of two stylistic extremes. Beginning in a detached tone of scientific observation, the narrator describes in verisimilar detail the nightmarish predicament in which they became entrapped. They then recount how the intensity of their suffering caused their sense of fantasy and reality to blur. Only after being brought to the brink of lunacy by the most unspeakable visions, does the narrator explain how they contrived to escape.

As much as the horrendous trials Pym endures in the novel's first ten chapters (clinging to a wreck surrounded by sharks, ravaged by thirst and starvation, forced to consume human flesh) are the stuff of sensational sea stories, Poe's real interest is in using these ordeals to examine the grotesquely distorting effects of pure terror on the human mind in the same manner as the writers of the *Blackwood's* stories. Time and again Pym finds himself caught in an apparently inescapable predicament, and the prospect of his imminent death causes his frenzied imagination to overwhelm him. Like the *Blackwood's* narrators, he suffers both the torments of physical agony and of unbearable mental disturbance, before the controlling influence of reason is restored. This pattern repeats itself until Pym begins his journey to the Antarctic, where he is destined to discover an altogether new form of terror.

For Poe it must have been apparent that the psychological territory mapped by Gothic sea stories intersected with that of the *Blackwood's* tales, as both were concerned with representing the human mind pushed to its limit after being brought into violent confrontation with the extreme precariousness of the material world. Although Pym regains his grip on reality each time, the extravagantly horrible situations and hideous

reversals he experiences shatter any conception of the world as a place where natural laws hold firm and man's knowledge assures his safety. As the cryptic and insidious nature of reality becomes ever more apparent, Pym struggles to avoid the inescapable conclusion that he is at the mercy of the shifting, senseless play of phenomenal appearances and of his own imaginative aberrations.

Poe's uncanniest illustration of the limitations which haunt human perception involves one of the most famous of all maritime legends, the myth of the 'Flying Dutchman'. As Pym and the other survivors prepare for death, they become convinced that their salvation has arrived in the form of a Dutch brig which seems to be steering towards their overturned vessel. In a moment of Gothic spectacle in which the distinctions between active and inert matter, life and death, and human and animal are overturned, the sailor at the helm is revealed as a festering corpse whose welcoming gestures have been caused by the pecking of ravenous gull. Drawing closer, the brig is exposed as a floating graveyard littered with skeletal remains all "in the last and most loathsome state of putrefaction!"¹⁴²

Thus far Pym has found coherent explanations for everything he has seen and undergone, but in this case he admits that it was "utterly useless to form conjectures"¹⁴³ about what may have been the cause of this scene of unspeakable horror. Therefore, this episode marks the culmination of *Arthur Gordon Pym's* use of traditional Gothic situations and devices. At this point Poe exchanges the *Blackwood's* technique for inducing terror for an adapted formulation of his own, which hints at a gulf of primordial uncertainty surrounding all human knowledge. Crucially, this encounter occurs midway between Pym's departure from Nantucket and his crossing into the Antarctic Ocean, and is the first indication of the kind of fathomless mysteries Pym will find himself at the centre of when he draws near to the Polar shroud.

¹⁴² Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, in Quinn ed., *Poetry and Tales*, p 1086.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p 1088.

Considering the question of why America gave rise to a far more innovative body of maritime fiction than Britain, John Peck argues that it is important to regard the American sea story as “the product of, and reflection of, a country still in the process of formation”.¹⁴⁴ Unlike their British counterparts who have a firm place in their society, the sailors of American maritime fictions are “isolated individuals, heroes on the edge of a new frontier”.¹⁴⁵ The protagonists of American sea stories have chosen to spend their lives seeking out strange regions to be added to the totality of civilization, and they are defined by this activity. Pym, by contrast, has renounced the civilised world simply so that he can partake of a more intense order of experience. Without even knowing it, he is bound upon a course that will take him to the Antarctic, a place of seemingly miraculous phenomena.

In American Gothic sea stories the enigmatic vision of life on the ocean found in the works of the British Romantics and Gothic novelists became deeply interconnected with the new possibilities currently being opened up by U.S. geographical expansion. Gothic sea fiction became a literary form highly valued by American writers who sought to respond to the turbulent reshaping of their nation. Poe’s contemporaries Robert Montgomery Bird and James Kirke Paulding both wrote allegorical maritime tales (*The Ice-Island* (1827) and *The Ghost* (1830)) which follow the exploits of American travellers who stray from the familiar and venture into mysterious waters.

In Gothic sea stories such as these, the penetration of the sea’s aura of mystery was an endeavour depicted as inseparable from the realization of American identity and the fulfilment of national destiny. Rather than fearing what might lie in forbidding, unmapped regions, these Gothic stories endorsed the belief that it was the duty of Americans to go forth and extend the bounds of knowledge, and of their homeland. As Lenz writes, these

¹⁴⁴ John Peck, *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels 1719-1917* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) p 89.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

works enacted “the hunger for the unknown and the desire for the original”,¹⁴⁶ which was “so much a part of the American conception of the self”,¹⁴⁷ in this period. Instead of portraying them as irredeemably dangerous and strange, American Gothic sea stories represented these new realms as full of natural marvels and awaiting the pioneering young men who would convert them into American territory.

One space, however, could not be tamed so easily. What further distinguishes American Gothic sea stories is their depiction of the ocean as a vast and mysterious frontier. Unlike the remote regions which could be domesticated by settlers, in these Gothic tales the sea itself stands as a sobering reminder that man’s ambitions are nothing compared to the all-consuming destructive power of nature. While it can be subdued long enough to permit travel upon it, the sea remains an intrinsically deadly environment where survival perpetually hangs in the balance. Writing about *Arthur Gordon Pym*, Daniel Walden states that the American Gothic sea stories popular in Poe’s time frequently depicted an “oceanic wilderness”¹⁴⁸ which was “representative of an unquantifiable unknown”.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, what Pym’s sea voyage can be said to symbolize is his introduction to the awesome, preternatural horror of the elemental world, something whose true extent he beholds when he reaches the Antarctic.

As geographical spaces totally separate from the familiar landmasses of the earth and its great forbidding oceans, it is understandable why the Polar Regions became a feature of Gothic sea narratives. The tremendous isolation of these spaces, landscapes completely removed both from any recognisable earthly terrain and from the abysmal sea, meant that in the 1830s they remained wildernesses which were accessible only through the imagination. As a result, Poe introduces two key innovations in *Arthur Gordon Pym*.

¹⁴⁶ William E. Lenz, *The Poetics of the Antarctic*, p 36.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Daniel Walden, ‘The Coastal Frontier and the Oceanic Wilderness in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*’ (Baltimore: The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, 2011), p 17.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Firstly, he underscores the implicit connection between the sea story and the metaphysics of discovery by gradually transforming Pym's nautical journey into a voyage of exploration. Secondly, he takes the concept of the ocean as a place of fearsome strangeness, greatly enlarges it, and makes it integral to his Gothic representation of the Antarctic. Even more so than the sea, the novel depicts the South Polar Regions as sinister realms which refuse to give up their secrets.

Arthur Gordon Pym may have been the result of Poe's engagement with American sea fiction, but the work which had the greatest influence in shaping his Gothic conception of both the ocean and the Antarctic was not a maritime tale but a poem. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798), the Gothic sea story *par excellence* and the literary text which fixed the image of the South Pole as a place of mystery and terror in the minds of readers, was undoubtedly one of the primary inspirations not just for 'MS.' and 'A Descent' but also for *Arthur Gordon Pym*.¹⁵⁰ Thematically Poe's novel is extremely similar to the 'Ancient Mariner', certainly enough to confirm that it must have been closely modelled upon it. The two narratives feature an almost identical series of extraordinary elements, including a ship of the dead, a gigantic whirlpool, and a voyage to the outermost margins of reality at the Antarctic. In addition, both use the device of a journey to strange regions near the South Pole to investigate the mutability of human perceptions and the mysterious workings of the imagination.

Like *Arthur Gordon Pym*, the 'Ancient Mariner' was derived from a wealth of pre-existing material, including collections of sailor's stories, books of sea-lore and works of travel literature. It is this rich and diverse combination of source materials which gives Coleridge's poem and Poe's novel their enormously varied forms. In the same fashion that the growing interest in the Antarctic and the proposal of an American exploring expedition

¹⁵⁰ Floyd Stovall has made the most thorough study of Coleridge's influence on Poe's work and critical thought in 'Poe's Debt to Coleridge', *Studies in English*, July 1930, No. 10, p 70-127.

prompted Poe to write his nautical story, Coleridge composed the 'Ancient Mariner' after reading such intriguing accounts of southern navigation as Captain George Shelvocke's *A Voyage Round the World by Way of the Great South Sea* (1726) and Cook's *A Voyage Towards the South Pole, and Round the World* (1777). In these works Coleridge learned of such things as the treacherous Antarctic Ocean, the glittering icebergs which dwarfed ships, and the polar waters which teemed with weird life-forms.¹⁵¹

Unlike Poe's Antarctic sea, which turns milky white and unbearably warm as Pym moves closer to the Pole, the inhospitableness of Coleridge's southern ocean is manifest in its "wondrous cold"¹⁵² and ice-bergs which reach "mast-high".¹⁵³ At first the Mariner tries to convey the magnificent frozen strangeness of these towering masses of ice by comparing them to mountainous emeralds. However, as with Pym's attempt to describe the strange phenomena of the island of Tsalal and the Polar shroud, the sheer alienness of these regions comes very close to rendering language useless. Coleridge's Antarctica is a spectral world where no "shapes of men nor beasts"¹⁵⁴ can be seen, and where the restless movement and perpetual howling of the ice imbues the whole scene with an unearthly presence, giving the impression that it is somehow alive.

Before long the Mariner watches as all the visible polar phenomena is consumed by a "dismal sheen"¹⁵⁵ which conceals rather than illuminates, whereas Pym finds the contents of his polar world lit from below by a curious "luminous glare"¹⁵⁶ whose source cannot be traced. In this way, in the 'Ancient Mariner' the Antarctic's only recognisable connection with the rest of the natural world is its all-encompassing ice. Like Pym drifting silently

¹⁵¹ Coleridge's use of polar exploration accounts as source material for the 'Ancient Mariner' has been discussed by Victoria Nelson, 'Symmes Hole, or the South Polar Grotto' in *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001) p 138-161, Eric G. Wilson, *The Spiritual History of Ice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) p 139-215, Martin Gardner, ed. *The Annotated Ancient Mariner* (London: Anthony Blond, 1965), p 41-47, and Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time*, p 83-91.

¹⁵² Martin Gardner, ed. *The Annotated Ancient Mariner*, p 45.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p 47.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, p 1179.

towards the great cataract at the base of the world, when the Mariner is swept to the extreme south he finds himself in the most perfect state of isolation imaginable. As Eric G. Wilson has observed, at the Antarctic the Mariner is as removed from civilization as someone on “the moon”,¹⁵⁷ something which is also true of Poe’s hero.

The Antarctic’s appearance in the ‘Ancient Mariner’ is brief, but as with *Arthur Gordon Pym* its role in the text is absolutely crucial. In both of these works, the protagonists are drawn to the extreme south as if by some unseen force, the obvious difference being that Coleridge’s Mariner makes his journey there early on while Pym’s narrative culminates with his bizarre polar voyage. The sublime desolation of Coleridge’s “cold country”¹⁵⁸ is made convincing due to his close adherence to actual exploration accounts, but ultimately his Gothic rendering of Antarctica is not intended to be any more realistic than Poe’s version. Instead, it is the narrative function the extreme south performs which concerns Coleridge as much as it does Poe. It is at the Antarctic that the accounts of these travellers leave behind the factual and begin to embrace the marvellous and the terrifying.

In Poe’s novel, as in Coleridge’s poem, the white lands leading to the South Pole are not merely some uncharted territory to be opened up by the powers of the human understanding. Both works depict the extreme south as another kind of space entirely, one which has been kept hidden from mankind’s view by its unreachableness. However, the Antarctic realms presented in the two texts are ultimately very different. In Coleridge’s fable the monstrous desolation of the South Polar Regions makes them nothing less than a vision of hell on earth. For Pym, the Antarctic is a place of conceptual transformation where his view of reality becomes unstable. For the Mariner, the Antarctic is a horrifying underworld where he encounters such explicitly supernatural entities as the ghastly

¹⁵⁷ *The Spiritual History of Ice*, N 71., p 260.

¹⁵⁸ *The Annotated Ancient Mariner*, p 48.

embodiments of Death and Life-in-Death. Pym also comes face to face with a polar phantom, but the great white figure which looms before him as he races towards infinity lacks any connection to the human world. Instead, it is the final manifestation of the inscrutable strangeness which has come to envelop him in the closing stages of his voyage.

The 'Ancient Mariner' may have been the work which first brought the Antarctic to Poe's attention, but the poem's merging of realistic nautical detail with the wondrously fantastic was not an entirely new departure in literature. In 1751 another novel had chronicled an imaginary voyage to the South Pole. Indeed, Robert Paltock's *Peter Wilkins* closely resembles *Arthur Gordon Pym* insofar as the convincing verisimilitude of its early sections of seafaring and shipwreck link it to the tradition of maritime adventure tales. At the same time, the novel is also a fusion of elements from a variety of earlier narratives. In Paltock's stupendous depiction of a race of winged beings living in a subterranean paradise it is possible to detect a rich literary heritage, reaching as far back as mankind's first mythic stories of flight.

Presenting itself as a genuine travel account much like *Arthur Gordon Pym*, *Peter Wilkins* records the various escapades and intrigues which befell its hero when he went to sea, before he found himself inexorably drawn to the South Pole and the truly astounding phase of his adventures began. In this way, by presenting a series of perilous incidents on the high seas as a prelude to an Antarctic voyage which itself leads to the discovery of an unknown land, thematically *Peter Wilkins* anticipates Poe's novel to a remarkable degree. However, the most direct correlation between Paltock's novel and *Arthur Gordon Pym* lies in their shared depiction of the Antarctic as a site where commonplace reality gives way to a dazzlingly stranger vision of things.

What makes Paltock's depiction of the polar realm so intriguing is that it is an imagining mostly derived from the guesswork and conjectures of its age. Like Coleridge's

infernally cold country and Poe's disorientating southern world, it is a speculative fantasy extrapolated from contemporary scientific and pseudoscientific theories. As Wilkins enters this phantasmagorical region, the daylight fades until it is replaced with perpetual darkness. Wilkins locates the source of the Pole's irresistible power in a "Rock of extraordinary Height",¹⁵⁹ which contains a "great Quantity of Loadstone, or was itself one vast Magnet".¹⁶⁰ No mere theoretical point, in Paltock's novel the South Pole is visibly manifest in the form of a towering pillar of magnetised stone which exerts an unshakable influence.

Paltock may well have borrowed this detail from Mercator's 16th century map of the world. This is the same map whose system of subterranean oceans Poe refers to in the note which he appended to his first Antarctic voyage fiction, 'MS.'¹⁶¹ That Poe had read *Peter Wilkins* is a certainty, for he mentions it in one of his *Literati of New York City* articles.¹⁶² Harold Beaver speculates that Poe may have discovered it by way of the 'Hollow Earth' theory of Symmes, who was probably familiar with the book.¹⁶³ However he came to know of it, the similarity of the two texts is great enough to suggest that when Poe set about writing *Arthur Gordon Pym*, Paltock's fertile combination of the verisimilar and the completely imaginary with its depiction of a portal at the South Pole was another of his literary models.

In an era before Cook had begun his voyages of discovery, there was nothing accidental about Paltock's choice of the Antarctic as the obvious destination for his hero. It made sense that it should be there, at the last unfathomed expanse of the planet's surface, that Wilkins finds himself swept through a cataract into an inner domain which is purely a

¹⁵⁹ Robert Paltock, *The Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins*, ed., Christopher Bentley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p 62.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p 67.

¹⁶¹ Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, p 199.

¹⁶² Edgar Allan Poe, 'Richard Adams Locke', in Thompson ed., *Essays and Reviews*, p 1218.

¹⁶³ Harold Beaver, ed., *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, p 244.

product of Paltock's imagination. In this respect, *Peter Wilkins* was the first work of fiction to make the transition from a traditional seafaring tale to a fantastical adventure narrative by embracing the wonder and mystery which had accumulated around the *terra australis incognita*. In Paltock's novel, as in *Arthur Gordon Pym*, the Antarctic acts not only as the link between different states of reality but also as an interstice between two radically different literary modes.

To conclude this section, it is clear that *Arthur Gordon Pym*'s episodes of maritime adventure function as a recognisable point of departure for a narrative which Poe always intended to take into realms well beyond the familiar territory of such works, and even outside the scope of the supernatural sea story. What Poe symbolically captures in Pym's sea voyage is mankind's consuming impulse to move beyond the immediate, to push outward away from civilization in search of obscure and hidden realms of signification. *Arthur Gordon Pym* rises above any straightforward nationalistic concerns and uses the weird trappings of the Gothic sea story to probe the belief that 'out there', on what Beaver has termed some "remote geographical horizon"¹⁶⁴ lies a "'truth' of the imagination"¹⁶⁵ eternally awaiting our discovery.

Furthermore, it is only because the early chapters of *Arthur Gordon Pym* conform to the different genres of sea story and appear to depict a universe of plausible material realities that its closing scenes of escalating psychic dislocation at the Antarctic have such devastating power. Instead of simply contesting the logic behind the expansionistic rhetoric then becoming prevalent in American society, Poe refashions the Gothic sea story into a conceptual device for portraying the confrontation between the mind and the uncanny Otherness of wondrous new phenomena. Pym's voyage may see him survive the most

¹⁶⁴ Harold Beaver, ed., *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, p xvii.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

extreme physical ordeals, but it is only when he arrives at the absolute south that he begins to perceive the terrifying strangeness inherent in creation.

In earlier Gothic sea stories the Antarctic had been characterised as a supernatural domain. As Elizabeth Leane notes, these tales presented the South Pole as “a place where the subject experiences both infinite insight and total dissolution, the sublime in concert with the abject”.¹⁶⁶ However, *Arthur Gordon Pym* surpasses these works by depicting the Antarctic not merely as an inhospitable realm but one where man can never be at home and where he is simply not meant to be. In the novel, the human body is not conditioned to operate in the Antarctic nor is the mind oriented to fully comprehend it. Only Pym’s Gothic imagination allows him to survive his journey to the Pole, but even he dies once his account has been completed and he becomes a ghostly presence haunting his own narrative. He has travelled further than any other explorer and received a terrible glimpse of the alien in nature.

¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth Leane, *Antarctica in Fiction: Imaginative Narratives of the Far South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p 63.

Section 3: “Not the Green of Earth...”:¹⁶⁷ *Arthur Gordon Pym, The Journal of William Reynolds, and the Discovery of the Antarctic Terra Firma*

In December 1839, seventeen months after Arthur Pym returned to New York and more than eleven years after his fateful crossing into the Antarctic Circle, another young sailor began his own journey into the South Polar Regions. William Reynolds was only twenty-three when he joined the U.S. Exploring Expedition, but unlike Poe’s Pym he had already served a lengthy apprenticeship at sea, and in the previous seven years had travelled as far as South America, the Mediterranean, Africa and Sumatra. In spite of all his earlier adventures and his subsequent service in the U.S. navy during the Civil War, it was the Antarctic phase of Reynold’s time with the Exploring Expedition which became the defining episode of his distinguished career. Although he spent little over a month sailing in the Southern Ocean, Reynolds’s actions in this region earned him a permanent place in the history of exploration.

As an author who had already made imaginative use of the theme of geographical exploration for his short tales, Poe’s reading of Jeremiah Reynolds’s *Address* (1836) and Benjamin Morrell’s *Narrative of Four Voyages* (1832) (the two works which alerted the American public to the potential discoveries to be made at the Antarctic) was undoubtedly what led him to the theme of an expedition to the extreme south. Aside from the writings of Reynolds and Morrell, extensive textual scrutiny¹⁶⁸ has demonstrated that Poe relied upon a varied collection of travel and exploration literature (most notably works by James Cook, William Scoresby, and Washington Irving) to furnish him with details for Pym’s

¹⁶⁷ William Reynolds, *The Private Journal of William Reynolds United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842*, ed., Nathaniel Philbrick and Thomas Philbrick (New York: Penguin, 2004), p 127.

¹⁶⁸ Among the more significant pieces of source scholarship on *Arthur Gordon Pym* are Burton R. Pollin, ‘Sources’, *The Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe – Volume One: Imaginary Voyages* (New York: Gordian Press, 1994), p 17-28, Burton R. Pollin, ‘Poe’s Life Reflected through the Sources of *Pym*’ in Richard Kopley ed., *Poe’s Pym: Critical Explorations*, p 95-106, Joseph V. Ridgely, ‘The Growth of the Text’ *The Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe – Volume One: Imaginary Voyages*, p 29-36, and Harold Beaver, ‘Introduction’ *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (London: Penguin, 1975), p 7-30.

voyage. Indeed, critics have revealed *Arthur Gordon Pym* to be a veritable patchwork of material borrowed from these publications, with some arguing that their influence so far outweighs that of works of fiction that they should be considered the real primary inspirations for Poe's novel.¹⁶⁹

Although *Arthur Gordon Pym* was undoubtedly enriched by Poe's incorporation of factual detail, it is important to focus on the reason why he went to such lengths to introduce this quality of verisimilitude into a narrative which, in its closing episodes, is manifestly a Gothic fantasy. In 1934 H.G. Wells wrote that regardless of the weird irreality of its final pages, the novel showed "what a very intelligent mind could imagine about the south polar regions a century ago",¹⁷⁰ As this section shall contend, what *Arthur Gordon Pym*'s polar episodes present is an imaginative projection of the first human sighting of a realm totally new to science. Pym's penetration of the Antarctic ice barrier sees him enter a world where nature assumes strange and terrifying forms. To capture the combination of fascination and horror which overwhelms his young explorer as he moves nearer to the Pole, Poe augments the traditional aesthetics of Gothic fiction with an uncanny semblance of realism.

It is in chapters seventeen and eighteen of *Arthur Gordon Pym* that the novel leaves behind the path which had been traced by actual Antarctic explorers and begins to forge one of its own. Allowing his imagination to continue from where genuine exploration narratives had left off, Poe depicts Pym's hazardous passage across the uncharted waters of the Southern Ocean, through the great barrier, and his entrance into regions "never trodden by the footsteps of man",¹⁷¹ to use Jeremiah Reynolds's phrase. In order to evaluate Poe's

¹⁶⁹ See Robert L. Carringer, 'Circumscription of Space and the Form of Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*', *PMLA* 89 (1974), p 506-512 and J.V. Ridgely and Iola S. Haverstick, 'Chartless Voyage: The Many Narratives of *Arthur Gordon Pym*' in Graham Clarke ed. *Edgar Allan Poe: Critical Assessments Vol. 3* (Sussex: Helm Information, 1991), p 224-240.

¹⁷⁰ H.G. Wells, *An Experiment in Autobiography Vol. 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p 97.

¹⁷¹ *An Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition*, p 90.

gothicised projection of Antarctic discovery, this section shall consider it not from the perspective of the source material Poe used to fabricate it but in light of the private journal of William Reynolds. In this account Reynolds recorded the incredible circumstances in which he made the first fully verified sighting of the Antarctic Continent, an event which took place only eighteen months after the publication of *Arthur Gordon Pym*.

It would be no exaggeration to say that in the early 19th Century an expedition to solve the mystery of the Antarctic represented an undertaking of the same order of magnitude that landing men on the moon represented in the second half of the 20th Century. The extent of the dangers, the vast distances to be overcome, the wondrous, near-mythical nature of the destination itself, and the wealth of knowledge to be attained, meant that both endeavours set new standards for scientific achievement. Jeremiah Reynolds himself even drew a parallel between the search for the South Pole and the study of the heavens. In his *Address* he expressed his incomprehension that so much of the Southern Hemisphere should still be composed of regions “of which we know little more than we do of the planet Georgium Sidus [Uranus], or an orb revolving round one of the most distant of the twinkling stars”.¹⁷²

Reynolds considered it remarkable that man should be so “anxious to tread the milky way”¹⁷³ and to “extend his researches to the utmost bounds of creation”,¹⁷⁴ when “so large a part of our own earth”,¹⁷⁵ lying not millions of miles out in space but “within the bounds of practical experiment”,¹⁷⁶ should remain equally as mysterious. However, when the U.S. began its attempts to reach the earth’s satellite 125 years after Reynolds addressed Congress, her astronauts were already fully informed about the conditions they were to expect on the lunar surface. William Reynolds and the officers of the Exploring Expedition

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

possessed no such definite knowledge about what they would ultimately find when they began traversing the Southern Ocean aboard a former Sloop-of-War, the ‘Peacock’, in the last days of December, 1839. Theirs was truly a voyage into the unknown.

Like Pym, it did not take Reynolds long to realize that he was somewhere radically different from anywhere else on the planet. At the beginning of chapter seventeen, Poe’s narrator is left in awe as he beholds “several large ice islands”¹⁷⁷ and a “floe of field ice”,¹⁷⁸ while William Reynolds was also astounded by “the wondrous beauty of the floating mass”¹⁷⁹ of pack ice which surrounded the ‘Peacock’ [Fig. 12,13]. He had difficulty finding words to describe “the wildest forms”¹⁸⁰ of these natural wonders, which were “weathered into the most fanciful shapes – & cold & Icy as they were, glowing with the most vivid and brilliant hues”.¹⁸¹ Overcome by the unearthly majesty of this scene, where (as in *Arthur Gordon Pym*) everything was subsumed by an intense whiteness “like unto the raiment of an Angel”,¹⁸² Reynolds fought to make out what lay ahead of the ship. Dazzled by the white glare until he and the others found that their “very vision ached”,¹⁸³ he finally discerned that what was rising before them “was neither earth nor sea”¹⁸⁴ but towering masses of ice.

¹⁷⁷ Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, p 1130.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ *The Private Journal of William Reynolds*, p 125.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

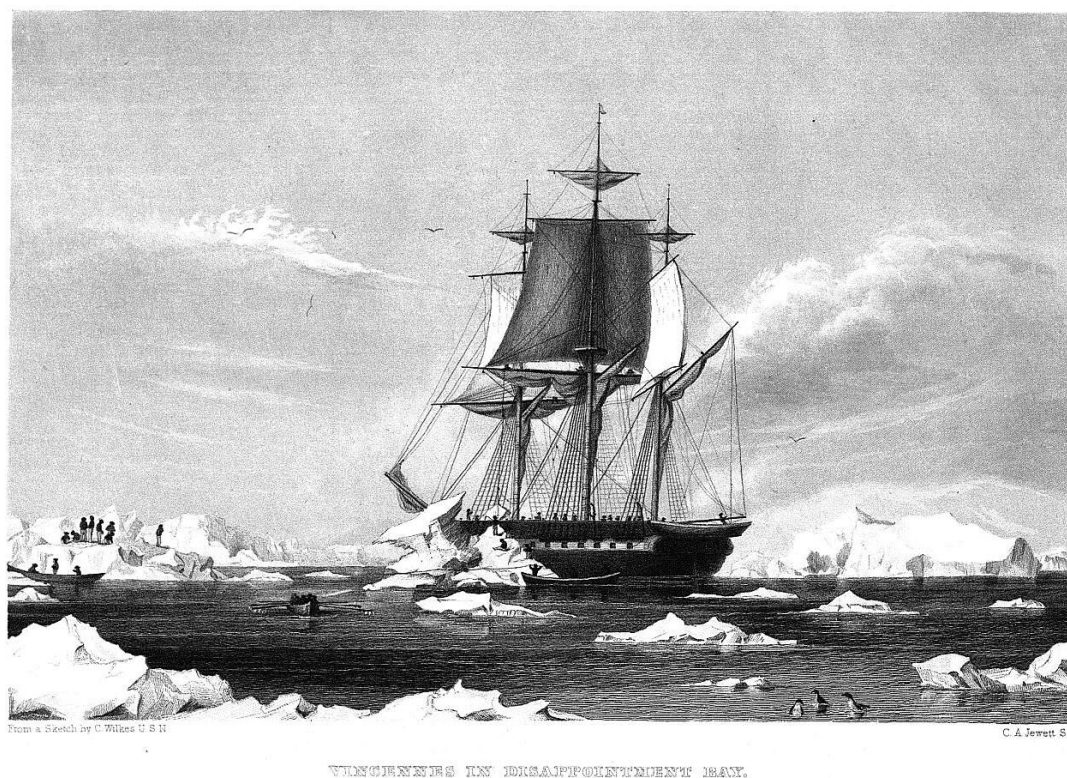


**Fig. 12: One of the ships of the United States Exploring Expedition navigating icy waters,
from a drawing by Charles Wilkes**

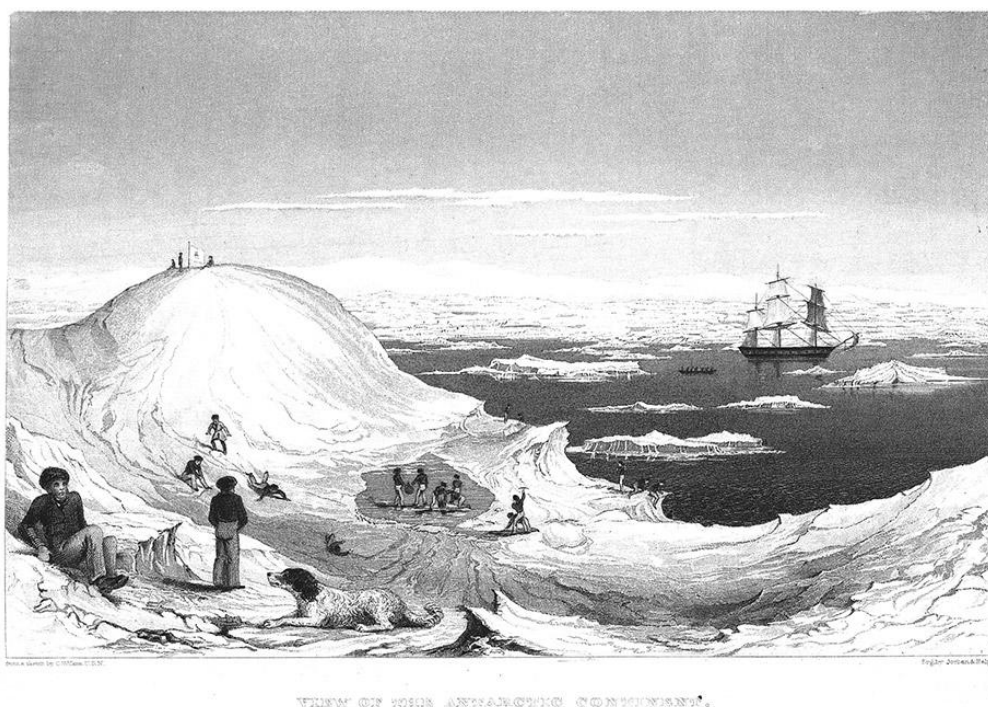


Fig. 13: The men of the Exploring Expedition enjoying some shore leave on an iceberg

Reynolds was not the only polar voyager to be deeply unsettled by the Antarctic's ability to metamorphose from a state of tranquil sublimity to one of monstrous hostility. Paul Simpson-Housley has analyzed the aesthetic responses of explorers and imaginative writers to the Antarctic's unique environment, investigating how it has engendered both images of beauty and also "landscapes and seascapes of fear and desolation".¹⁸⁵ In particular, he has assessed how the "very strange environment"¹⁸⁶ of the Southern Polar Regions has a long history of generating perceptions which "conflicted with the actual nature"¹⁸⁷ of what really exists there. Poe's depiction of imaginary Antarctic realms and Reynolds's account of traversing the Southern Ocean both portray the many deceptive aspects of existence in the far south.

In his footnote to chapter eighteen, Pym mentions the misleading effects of living in a Gothic world with "no night at all".¹⁸⁸ Here the unbroken daylight means that it is impossible to observe the passage of time, and traditional terms like 'morning' and 'evening' lose their significance. William Reynolds found this phenomenon similarly disconcerting. In his journal he records the strange experience of watching the "chameleon like"¹⁸⁹ play of glowing colours on the polar horizon, which immediately begins to grow bright again after sunset. Although he knows that it is now night and there is a full moon "high in the heavens",¹⁹⁰ Reynolds describes how the "Eternal day"¹⁹¹ of the Polar Regions "blots out the Stars altogether".¹⁹² When Pym sights a great quantity of field ice "rising in tiers, one mass above the other",¹⁹³ he is too absorbed with detailing how this might obstruct the 'Jane Guy's' progress to dwell upon the spectacle which the frozen lair

¹⁸⁵ Paul Simpson-Housley, *Antarctica: Exploration, Perception, and Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 1992), p xvii.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p xvi.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1135.

¹⁸⁹ *The Private Journal of William Reynolds*, p 129.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1131

presents. Reynolds, meanwhile, was mesmerized by the otherworldliness of a scene where giant black clouds “hung in gloomy contrast over the stainless field of White beneath them”.¹⁹⁴

Having employed a Gothic mode in his short tales in order to illustrate the imagination’s capacity to create its own intensified realities, it is unsurprising that Poe should have been intrigued by his reading of polar exploration literature. In these works he discovered that there were entire geographical realms where appearance was frequently at a perilous remove from reality, and explorers were constantly betrayed by their own senses. J. Lasley Dameron has argued that William Scoresby’s 1823 journal of his pioneering scientific voyage to the Arctic, with its descriptions of the “psychological effects of natural phenomena common to polar regions”,¹⁹⁵ was the text chiefly responsible for shaping the Antarctic episodes of *Arthur Gordon Pym*. However, Poe depicts Pym’s efforts to comprehend the startling Otherness of the Antarctic regions as an intrinsically Gothic process. His polar world ultimately becomes a place of infinite strangeness unlike any found in actual exploration literature, and to survive there Pym must let his imagination take over from his intellect.

Pym first encounters the confounding indeterminacy of Antarctic conditions when the ‘Jane Guy’ enters 73° latitude, and “an immense expanse of firm ice”¹⁹⁶ appears to put an end to his journey. He then notices that the cold in this region has not increased, and soon sights “much open water to the southward”,¹⁹⁷ which allows the vessel to continue on its doom-laden voyage. William Reynolds was also struck by the “extreme and unexpected mildness”¹⁹⁸ of the temperatures within the Antarctic Circle, and after the ‘Peacock’

¹⁹⁴ *The Private Journal of William Reynolds*, p 129.

¹⁹⁵ J. Lasley Dameron, ‘Pym’s Polar Episode: Conclusion or Beginning?’ in Richard Kopley ed., *Poe’s Pym: Critical Explorations*, p 42.

¹⁹⁶ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1130.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ *The Private Journal of William Reynolds*, p 126.

successfully navigated a gargantuan ice field the members of the expedition became convinced that no further fields “could exist but in a very high Southern Latitude”.¹⁹⁹ Feverish excitement broke among the crew, as they anticipated “the prospect of an uninterrupted run”²⁰⁰ to a latitude of 75°, which would see them “eclipse Cook, and distance the pretender Weddell”.²⁰¹ Following a change in the weather, Reynolds suddenly beheld a sight so horrifying that he and the others could “scarcely credit our senses”.²⁰² “Like men awakening from a dream”,²⁰³ they saw that “a low and continuous field of Ice running East and West”²⁰⁴ had materialised as if from nowhere, “effectually stopping any farther progress South”.²⁰⁵

This seemingly impossible combination of high temperatures and monolithic masses of ice comes to dominate these real and fictitious accounts of the South Polar Sea, and Pym’s narrative closely anticipates the sense of profound disorientation Reynolds would later convey in his. While pursuing a course through a mild and empty portion of the polar sea, Pym is amazed by the sight of “icebergs of incredible size”²⁰⁶ in waters but a small distance away. The ‘Jane Guy’ eventually reaches a latitude of 78°, but now Pym observes that “nothing was to be seen in the direction of the pole but one apparently limitless floe, backed by absolute mountains of ragged ice, one precipice of which arose frowningly above another”.²⁰⁷ Once again this impasse is an illusion, and soon the ‘Jane Guy’ breaches the ice barrier and locates a stretch of sea where “not a particle of ice was to be discovered”.²⁰⁸ Having experienced an “excessive”²⁰⁹ cold only four days earlier, here

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1131.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p 1132.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p 1131.

Pym finds that “the temperature of the air was mild and pleasant”²¹⁰ and all those aboard feel “certain of attaining the Pole”.²¹¹

After sailing along the edge of the ice barrier exactly like Poe’s ‘Jane Guy’, the ‘Peacock’ was unable to find a safe channel through it. Reynolds came to the realization that for now this “vast expanse of the frozen sea upon which human eye nor foot have ever rested”²¹² was an “impassable boundary”²¹³ to “the mysterious regions beyond”.²¹⁴ As noted in section one, the question of what existed below the Antarctic Circle saw the American public caught up in speculation as to what the region was composed of. In *Arthur Gordon Pym*, Poe conflates all of the theoretical possibilities by depicting a zone of iceless water leading to the dark island of Tsalal, and then onward to the hallucinatory splendour and supernal whiteness of the Polar shroud. The novel depicts the discovery of Antarctic lands not once but twice, when the ‘Jane Guy’ happens upon the lifeless Bennet’s Islet and a second time when she reaches Tsalal, the island of death, before Pym and Dirk Peters go in search of the Pole itself.

Although the description of the ‘Jane Guy’s crossing of the Southern Ocean in *Arthur Gordon Pym* and Reynolds’s authentic account of the same journey evidently share some remarkable similarities, Poe by no means excludes the fantastical entirely. One of the most vivid features of his gothicised Antarctic icescape is its array of bizarre creatures, including a “large bird of a brilliant blue plumage”,²¹⁵ a colossal and savage polar bear, and a “singular-looking land-animal”²¹⁶ with the characteristics of a rat, cat and a dog. Poe clearly delights in the creation of these strange forms of polar life, but they also reveal much about his overall technique. As incongruous assortments of elements in which the

²¹⁰ Ibid, 1132.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² *The Private Journal of William Reynolds*, p 127.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1131.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p 1135.

real and imaginary are skilfully combined, they embody the same artistic principle which Poe uses to construct his Gothic Antarctic world, only in miniature. Tellingly, both the bear and land animal have fur which is “perfectly white”,²¹⁷ the same absolute and enigmatic whiteness which exists at the Polar shroud, a place of pure invention.

William Reynolds’s must have felt acute disappointment when the ‘Peacock’ found no way through the ice barrier, for this appeared to dash his hopes that the Exploring Expedition would finally ascertain whether or not “a Continent, the Existence of which has been so much disputed”²¹⁸ was to be found within the Antarctic Ocean. Therefore, it was a testament to Reynolds’s sober attitude to his mission that even after he noticed “several peaks showing very distinctly”²¹⁹ above the barrier which he knew immediately “*must be Land*”,²²⁰ he followed scientific protocol and waited patiently until more accurate sightings could be made. Only then could the great discovery of “the long sought for Terra Firma of the Antarctic”²²¹ be confirmed at last, and the expedition’s commander Lieutenant Charles Wilkes christened the land ‘Antarctica’. After carefully observing the towering summits which reached into the clouds, Reynolds wrote that “I will never give up my belief that this was no deception & am perfectly willing to abide by the researches of any future navigators, confident that our discovery will be verified!”²²²

In Poe’s novel, Pym is merely a witness to the first sighting of land in the Southern Ocean. After exploring Bennet’s Islet and finding no sign “that any living creature had ever been here before”,²²³ other than what appears to be the smashed prow of a canoe (a foreshadowing both of the ‘Jane Guy’’s eventual destruction but also of the climactic plunge of Pym’s canoe into the polar abyss), the crew become anxious to return. Even

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Quoted in David Day, *Antarctica: A Biography*, p 73.

²¹⁹ *The Private Journal of William Reynolds*, p 127.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1133/34.

when the ‘Jane Guy’ runs low on fuel and the sailors show symptoms of scurvy (two of the factors which led Morrell and Weddell to give up their bids for the South Pole ²²⁴), Pym convinces Captain Guy to persist.

The crew are also the first to notice a “constant tendency to the southward, both in the wind and current”,²²⁵ but Pym dismisses their ominous speculations, having fallen completely under the thrall of the Pole’s mysterious influence. As noted in Section One, the affinity between Pym and the Pole is so powerful that while he presents his fascination with it as grounded in scientific curiosity, in reality he is led by a providential vision that more lands exist further south. Although he has witnessed its terrible duplicity, Pym remains certain that the Antarctic conceals some wonder beyond imagination. It is this conviction which seals the fate of the ‘Jane Guy’ and her crew.

William Reynolds learned just how deadly the lure of the Antarctic could be when the ‘Peacock’ made one final attempt to penetrate the ice barrier, only to collide with a huge iceberg. The ship’s rudder was destroyed, and the whole vessel looked set to be crushed by vast pieces of floating ice which instantly began to swarm around it. Reynolds wrote that he “felt neither fear nor dread”²²⁶ but rather a set of “sensations indescribable in themselves”,²²⁷ as one end of the ‘Peacock’ was hurled against an ice island “many miles in Extent”²²⁸ and whose highest peaks “towered above the Main topmast head”.²²⁹ As the crew tried to unfurl the ship’s sails, a huge frozen ridge was disturbed and blocks of ice weighing many tonnes fell into the water, narrowly missing the deck. Only swift, decisive action saw the ‘Peacock’ steered to safety.

²²⁴ *Antarctica: A Biography*, p 41.

²²⁵ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1135.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ *The Private Journal of William Reynolds*, p 130.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

To conclude this section, Poe revisited the Antarctic in his review of *A Brief Account of the Discoveries and Results of the United States' Exploring Expedition*, a pamphlet reprinted by the *American Journal of Sciences and Arts* in September 1843. In this he expressed his dismay that it still remained the “fashion to doubt the actual discovery of this continent”,²³⁰ when thanks to the expedition’s perseverance any scepticism on this front was now “unreasonable”.²³¹ In Poe’s opinion, this lingering uncertainty concerning the Antarctic Continent was only part of the American people’s “general impression”,²³² that “little or nothing was accomplished”,²³³ by the expedition. He laid the blame for this misperception on the “compendious account furnished by Captain Charles Wilkes”,²³⁴ a work Poe criticized for being “somewhat less luminous than succinct”,²³⁵ and he welcomed a concise account of the voyage which finally did justice “not less to the scheme itself than to the many able and respectable gentlemen who constituted the scientific corps”.²³⁶

Fifteen months after its return to New York, and the full extent of the expedition’s accomplishments had at last been made clear. Poe wrote that it had actually succeeded in realizing its “more momentous objects”,²³⁷ and he commended its intrepid officers for achieving “all that could be desired”,²³⁸ with regard to “the discovery and investigation of new lands”,²³⁹ and the “advancement of many important branches of natural science”.²⁴⁰ Poe then curiously undercut this praise by maintaining that “something more...might have been performed”,²⁴¹ to determine the nature of the South Pole itself. Overlooking the

²³⁰ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘Review of A Brief Account of the Discoveries and Results of the United States’ Exploring Expedition’ in G.R. Thompson ed. *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews*, p 1250.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid, p 1248.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Ibid, p 1249.

²³⁹ Ibid, p 1248.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p 1249

²⁴¹ Ibid, p 1248.

enormous risks it had taken in crossing the Southern Ocean and the near-disaster at the ice-barrier, Poe wrote that it “must forever remain a subject for wonder, regret and mortification, that, having sailed for fifteen hundred miles along an Antarctic continent, the Expedition should have been enabled to furnish no result more satisfactory than a few stones picked up from fragments of floating ice”.²⁴²

In *Walden* (1854), Henry David Thoreau voiced his ambivalence about the true significance of the voyage when he wrote, “What was the meaning of that South-Sea Exploring Expedition...but an indirect recognition of the fact that there are continents and seas in the moral world to which every man is an isthmus or an inlet, yet unexplored by him, but that it is easier to sail many thousand miles through cold and storm and cannibals, in a government ship,...than it is to explore the private sea, the Atlantic and Pacific of one’s being alone”.²⁴³ Writing twelve years earlier, Poe had also remained cautious on the subject of the expedition’s legacy. For all his enthusiasm about the wealth of information which it had brought back and its triumphant confirmation of the Antarctic continent’s existence, the review’s pronounced tone of disenchantment (exemplified by Poe’s dismissive reference to the polar mineralogical specimens) suggests that he saw these achievements as merely an inadequate compensation for its failure to secure the much grander symbolic victory of reaching the South Pole.

As someone who had sent his own Gothic explorer on a voyage to fantastic alien lands hidden by the fabled ice barrier and then into the great unknown beyond the Pole itself, it was perhaps inevitable that Poe found even this extraordinary account of the realities of Antarctic navigation deeply unsatisfying. Poe had deliberately left his narrative incomplete at the Pole, with the implication that unimaginably greater wonders were still to come. In his eyes, the Exploring Expedition had been American science’s opportunity to

²⁴² Ibid, p 1251.

²⁴³ Henry David Thoreau, *Walden; or Life in the Woods* (London: Penguin, 1983) p 369-70.

reveal something totally new to the world, but it had fallen dismally short of his expectations. However, given that Poe himself appeared to have been convinced by Jeremiah Reynolds's claims that the expedition would reach the Pole and that the Gothic spaces he had imaginatively envisaged in *Arthur Gordon Pym* would shortly be known for real, Poe may well have been surprised to discover that the secret of degree zero was as elusive as he had depicted it. It would be another sixty-eight years before Roald Amundsen planted the Norwegian flag at the Pole, finally bringing all such speculation to an end.

Section 4: “A Region of Novelty and Wonder”:²⁴⁴ *Arthur Gordon Pym*, ‘MS. Found in a Bottle’, and Reading Poe’s Gothic Antarctic

Upon its publication *Arthur Gordon Pym* was widely reviewed in both American and British journals. Although most critics applauded Poe’s extraordinary descriptive powers and acknowledged the uncanny semblance of reality he had managed to bestow upon Pym’s adventures, it was the novel’s polar voyage episodes which tended to leave them confused and dismayed. An anonymous notice in the *New York Review* expressed the general attitude. It observed that while Poe had succeeded in investing most of his work with an “air of reality”²⁴⁵ its later stages were full of “too many strange horrors”²⁴⁶ to be convincing. In addition, the reviewer objected to the fact that Pym’s narrative was one with “no conclusion to it”²⁴⁷ and which “breaks off suddenly in a mysterious way, which is not only destitute of all *vraisemblance*, but is purely perplexing and vexatious”.²⁴⁸

These factors also proved too much for *Arthur Gordon Pym*’s English reviewers. The notice in the London *Atlas* praised the “fertile imagination”²⁴⁹ which Poe had used to fabricate an extraordinary exploration account which he had kept mostly within the bounds of believability. In their view, it was only Pym’s descriptions of his “strange experiences in the South Seas”²⁵⁰ and the “sudden termination of the story”²⁵¹ with the image of “a canoe drifting among the ice islands”²⁵² of the Antarctic, which caused the fiction to finally collapse into total fantasy. The reviewer for the *Spectator* echoed these sentiments, writing that Poe had proven himself a writer “of no mean skill”²⁵³ in taking his protagonist as far

²⁴⁴ Edgar Allan Poe, *Poetry and Tales*, p 1176.

²⁴⁵ ‘Unsigned notice in the *New York Review*, 3rd October 1838’ in I.M. Walker ed., *Edgar Allan Poe: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), p 98.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ ‘Unsigned review in the London *Atlas*, 20th October 1838’ in Ibid, p 103.

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p 102.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid, p 103.

²⁵³ ‘Unsigned review in the London *Spectator*, 27th October 1838’ in Ibid, p 103.

as “a hot and milky-looking ocean, with surrounding wonders of various kinds”,²⁵⁴ but in making this polar journey he had exhausted his powers of invention. In their opinion, the reason why Pym “abruptly breaks off his narrative whilst in full tilt for the South Pole”²⁵⁵ was that his creator was clearly “at a loss how to go on”.²⁵⁶

Although *Arthur Gordon Pym* is now recognised as occupying an important place in the history of fantastic literature, these reviewers were not the only readers who found little to admire in its peculiar experimentation with the possibilities of Gothic fiction. Henry James remained decidedly unimpressed by Poe’s efforts to create a mode of fear unique to his enigmatic Antarctic world. Writing about what he described as *Arthur Gordon Pym*’s “would-be portentous climax”²⁵⁷ in his 1909 preface to ‘The Altar of the Dead’, James deemed Poe’s otherworldly set-piece to be emblematic of the novel’s overall failure because it remained unconnected to “the indispensable history of somebody’s normal relation to something”.²⁵⁸

Even for a work of Gothic fiction, James regarded *Arthur Gordon Pym*’s climactic episodes as too removed from ordinary human experience to actually mean anything to the reader. For him, the confounding breakdown of Pym’s narrative at the South Pole meant that the various elements of Poe’s work could only “hang in the void”,²⁵⁹ leaving him with the abiding impression of an “effect lost”²⁶⁰ and an “imaginative effort wasted”.²⁶¹ Eighty years later, the novelist John Barth made a similar argument. In his essay ‘Still Farther South’ (1988), he attacked *Arthur Gordon Pym* on the grounds that its mode of grand

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p 104.

²⁵⁷ Henry James, ‘Preface to ‘The Altar of the Dead’ in Graham Clarke ed., *Edgar Allan Poe: Critical Assessments Vol. 3* (Sussex: Helm Information, 1991), p 213.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

metaphysical terror was reducible to no more than a set of ludicrous “genre effects”.²⁶² Like James, Barth considered it futile to follow Pym through twenty-five gruelling chapters of madness and horror, only to watch him disappear over “the edge of the South Polar Abyss”.²⁶³

Since *Arthur Gordon Pym* does not divulge any final secret, or even provide any definite clues as to what exists beyond the Pole which has become the all-consuming object of Pym’s journey, James and Barth assume that its mode of Gothic mystification is just an elaborate method for concealing the fact that the novel has no real significance. However, the enormous diversity of interpretations of *Arthur Gordon Pym* has only been made possible by the text’s many layers of ambiguity, which have the Pole at their centre. As this section shall demonstrate, it is precisely because Pym’s narrative culminates with a non-revelation of things which lie outside the scope of traditional representation that it has yielded such a rich body of interpretations. Instead of precluding all intelligibility, the novel’s resoundingly inconclusive ending at the fringes of the Polar shroud is what enables readers to continue to discover vastly different possibilities in Pym’s Antarctic voyage.

The second part of this section shall investigate how Poe takes his hero into the very heart of the polar enigma in chapter twenty-five of *Arthur Gordon Pym*. However, it is first essential to examine the novel’s relationship to his earlier tale of a journey to the Antarctic, ‘MS. Found in a Bottle’. The two texts share a considerable number of similarities, including their use of a personal narrative form, their morbid and sceptical protagonists, their depiction of a gothicized high seas voyage, and the appearance of the Flying Dutchman. Finally, both fade out on the brink of a polar cataract in a manner which only appears to intensify their profound mystery. These thematic affinities have led several

²⁶² John Barth ‘Still Farther South: Some Notes on Poe’s *Pym*’ in Richard Kopley ed., *Poe’s Pym: Critical Explorations*, p 225.

²⁶³ Ibid, p 227.

scholars to assume that ‘MS.’ acted as a template for Poe’s novel, and to read *Arthur Gordon Pym* as an expanded version of this short tale.

The Antarctic finale of ‘MS.’ certainly disproves the notion that Pym’s bid for Pole was a plot device Poe concocted to bring his faltering work to a close. However, an analysis of the tale reveals that its close resemblance to *Arthur Gordon Pym* is in fact misleading. First of all, as with so many of Poe’s short fictions ‘MS.’ is concerned with the obfuscation and ultimate negation of knowledge. From its opening line (“Of my country and of my family I have little to say”²⁶⁴) the reader is denied the vital information necessary for constructing a coherent image of the narrator, or a basis for determining the truth of what he relates. Unlike Pym, who divulges much about his personal history in the novel’s opening chapter, for the seafarer of ‘MS.’ such details are immaterial. Instead, he makes one thing known which he reckons shall be sufficient for any reader to believe his account. He is a man whose “deficiency of imagination”²⁶⁵ and habit of “referring occurrences”²⁶⁶ to the principles of “physical philosophy”²⁶⁷ means that “no person could be less liable than myself to be led away from the severe precincts of truth by the *ignes fatui* of superstition”.²⁶⁸

As a self-proclaimed “notorious”²⁶⁹ sceptic, whose “habits of rigid thought”²⁷⁰ have never misled him, the narrator of ‘MS.’ is confident that his “incredible tale”²⁷¹ is unlikely to be mistaken for the “raving of a crude imagination”.²⁷² By contrast, in the Preface to his narrative Pym explains that he was overcome with anxiety as to whether readers could ever

²⁶⁴ *Poetry and Tales*, p 189.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² *Ibid.*

put their trust in an account of his “extraordinary series of adventures”.²⁷³ The fact that he did not keep a detailed travel journal, his doubts about his own literary skills, together with the “positively marvellous”²⁷⁴ nature of the things he has claims to have witnessed, have deterred Pym from writing up a chronicle of all that he has “seen and undergone”²⁷⁵ in the extreme south, until now.

Only after the intervention of Mr. Poe is Pym finally convinced that he can publish an account of his adventures. While the seafarer in ‘MS.’ assumes that his insistence on his exceptional rationality rules out the possibility of disbelief, Pym is acutely conscious of the need to ensure that his reconstructed narrative has the “*appearance* of that truth it would really possess”²⁷⁶ if he had written it at the time. Unlike the seafarer of ‘MS.’, who never contemplates that his own imagination could be the source of the terrifying phenomena he describes, Pym is entirely aware that fact and fiction can be easily, and often unnoticeably, transposed.

There is another important distinction between Poe’s protagonists. Both Pym and the narrator of ‘MS.’ acknowledge their melancholic natures: Pym possesses a “gloomy, although glowing imagination”²⁷⁷ while the seafarer of ‘MS.’ confesses that he has always been haunted by “a kind of nervous restlessness”.²⁷⁸ The seafarer’s melancholia has led him to renounce the world and live a life of ceaseless voyaging. Although he is a dealer in antiquities, this is merely a pretext for keeping himself removed from commonplace reality and surrounded by the constant flux of the oceans. So intense is his sterile self-absorption that he has little interest in the details of his travels. His only desire is to maintain his perfectly rational view of things and keep his sense of gnawing disquiet subdued.

²⁷³ Ibid, p 1007.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p 1018.

²⁷⁸ Ibid, p 189.

Conversely, Pym's melancholia manifests itself in a reckless lack of self-interest. Instead of a blind indifference to the world, he is consumed by visions of penetrating uncharted seas. His "enthusiastic temperament"²⁷⁹ has been stimulated by his friend Augustus's stories of his travels to distant islands, and as a result he develops an "ardent longing for the wild adventures incident to the life of the navigator".²⁸⁰ To appease his almost irrational desire for sensational adventure, he happily surrenders the stability of his life in Nantucket. It is Pym's ever-deepening fascination with the terrors of the earth's unknown regions which eventually sees him drawn into the mystery of the Antarctic.

In other words, while the narrator of 'MS.' is as a perpetual wanderer, Pym's melancholy has instead made him into an authentic explorer. [Fig. 14] Like Julius Rodman, another of Poe's narrators whose "hereditary hypochondria"²⁸¹ leads him to undertake an expedition into "the *only* unexplored region within the limits of the continent of North America",²⁸² it is inevitable that Pym's voyage should culminate in his quest for the South Pole, the greatest geographical enigma of the age. Indeed, just as Poe emphasises that it is Rodman's "peculiar character"²⁸³ which makes him "*the man* to journey amid all that solemn desolation"²⁸⁴ of the Rocky Mountains, Pym's own ungovernable nature compels him to seek out the Pole. A far cry from the steadfast, patriotic pathfinder heroes of writers like Cooper, it is Pym and Rodman's perverse imaginations which make them the ideal figures to go in search of the most remote and forlorn regions imaginable.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, p 1018.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

²⁸¹ Ibid, p 1187.

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid, p 1190.

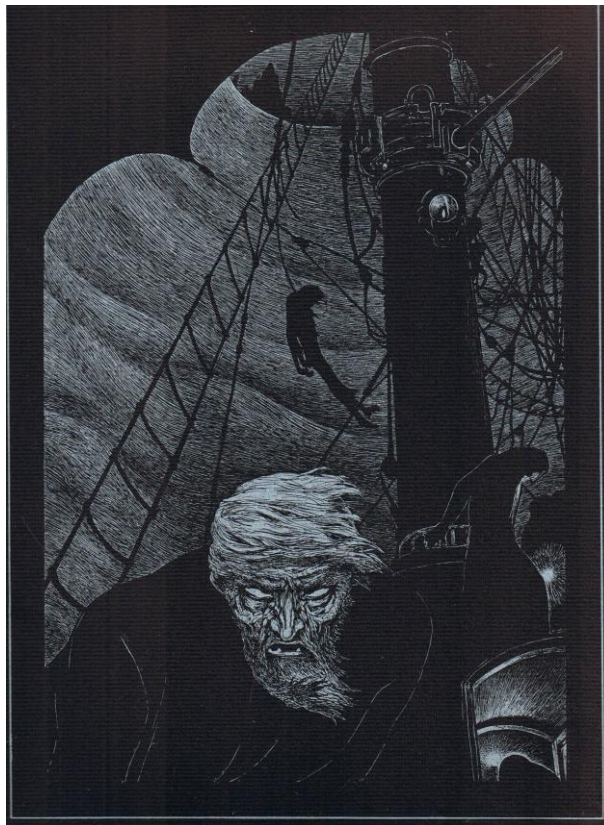


Fig. 14: The Melancholic Polar Explorer: Illustration for Poe's 'MS. Found in a Bottle' by Harry Clarke (1919)

Although the sequence of storm, shipwreck, the encounter with a ship of the dead, and the final arrival at the Pole appears identical in both 'MS.' and *Arthur Gordon Pym*, two key differences separate these narratives. Pym's journey is certainly a nightmarish one, replete with countless grotesque shifts and surprises. From his use of simple means to masquerade as the living cadaver of a poisoned sailor so convincingly that he frightens a mutineer to death to Pym's own uncertainty whether the hieroglyphs of Tsalal are the work of an ancient race or simply natural formations, the novel provides endless illustrations of the fearful unreliability of the interpretative act. Indeed, Edward Davidson is only one of many critics who have argued that *Arthur Gordon Pym*'s dominant theme is that "the whole world of matter and man is constituted of trickery and deception".²⁸⁵

²⁸⁵ Edward H. Davidson, *Poe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957) p 166.

Although Pym is often unable to separate illusion from reality and is deeply mistaken in many of his judgements, the abundant mystifications of his narrative are in no way depicted as insoluble. As horrific and unaccountable as many of his experiences initially seem, almost none are shown to lie outside the compass of simple explanation. As noted in section one, one of the rare exceptions is the “appalling and unfathomable mystery”²⁸⁶ of the Dutch brig crewed by festering corpses, but Pym still offers a range of probable causes for this spectacular manifestation of “hideous uncertainty”.²⁸⁷ Therefore, the earlier chapters of *Arthur Gordon Pym* stage what Daniel Walden has termed the quintessential “Gothic conflict between appearance and reality”,²⁸⁸ as time and again the reader follows Pym as he moves from terrified incomprehension through sober analysis to logical elucidation.

The novel’s investigation of the conditions of knowing undergoes a stark transformation when Pym arrives at the *terra incognita* of Tsalal, whose inhabitants are the very embodiment of the same primal force of savage duplicity he has already fought against. Pym can only give the vaguest impressions of the island’s dazzling wonders, but he rejects the notion that even its most fantastic phenomena will remain forever beyond human comprehension. Even here, “in a country differing essentially from any hitherto visited by civilized men”²⁸⁹ which contains “nothing with which we had been formerly conversant”,²⁹⁰ Pym never enters a state of absolute unknowing. When he grows conscious that language is inadequate to the task of convincing the reader of the existence of the incredible things he describes, Pym remains confident that “time and progressing

²⁸⁶ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1088.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p 1087.

²⁸⁸ Daniel Walden, ‘The Coastal Frontier and the Oceanic Wilderness in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*’ p 15.

²⁸⁹ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1140.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*.

science”²⁹¹ shall at length “verify some of the more important and improbable of my statements”.²⁹² Indeed, the very fact that Pym refers to these things as ‘apparent’ miracles implies that by the time he has come to write up his account they have largely been rendered intelligible.

For the narrator of ‘MS.’ there is no hope of such eventual enlightenment. From the phantom-ship and her spectral crew to the polar whirlpool itself, everything he encounters can only be described, never explained. As he writes of the strange vessel itself, “What she *is not*, I can easily perceive; what she *is*, I fear it is impossible to say”.²⁹³ He is shaken from his assurance in the indomitable power of his intellect by “a sensation that will admit of no analysis, to which the lessons of by-gone time are inadequate, and for which I fear futurity itself will offer me no key”.²⁹⁴ Engulfed by total uncertainty, he comes to understand that “I shall never – I know that I shall never – be satisfied with regard to the nature of my conceptions”.²⁹⁵ Regardless of the narrator’s declaration of his invulnerable reason at the beginning of the tale, ‘MS.’ is a portrait of a mind so deluded that it can be sure of nothing.

It is clear that Poe is utilizing a different formulation of the Gothic in ‘MS.’ than in *Arthur Gordon Pym*. J. Lasley Dameron has argued that while the novel describes “bizarre phenomena”²⁹⁶ but still fulfils “the demands of verisimilitude”,²⁹⁷ the earlier tale is “almost wholly supernatural in tone and content”.²⁹⁸ However, to conclude that ‘MS.’ is essentially just an elaborate tale of the supernatural is to entirely misinterpret Poe’s intent. What Pym’s disorientating voyage to Gothic realms at the far south vividly demonstrates is the

²⁹¹ Ibid, p 1044.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid, p 195/196.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, p 195.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ J. Lasley Dameron, ‘Pym’s Polar Episode: Conclusion or Beginning?’ in Richard Kopley ed., *Poe’s Pym: Critical Explorations*, p 39.

²⁹⁷ Ibid, p 43.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, p 37.

extreme fallibility of human perceptions and the constant struggle to achieve certain knowledge; 'MS.' casts doubt on the very possibility of such knowledge.

Arthur Gordon Pym may leave it to reader to decide how much of Pym's narrative has any basis in reality, but in the case of 'MS.' it is obvious that what the message in the bottle relates is pure fantasy. In the novel the hallucinatory devices of the supernatural sea story are used to illustrate the metaphysical obstacles which stand between the mind and truth, with Poe, in William Spengemann's words, deploying "the gothic as a mode of cognition",²⁹⁹ so that by the time he reaches the Pole it has become clear that Pym can only reach certainty by way of terrifyingly heightened misperceptions. In the short tale they are used to represent the unearthly phantasms created by the isolated narrator's long-suppressed imagination which have now driven him to madness.

Nothing underlines this distinction between the texts more than their closing sections. Pym proves instrumental in getting the 'Jane Guy' to abandon her roving in the South Seas for an attempt on the Pole. He consolidates his position as an explorer by continuing the expedition even after the vessel and its crew have been destroyed. In a frail canoe he defiantly goes forth towards the Polar shroud, intent on "opening to the eye of science one of the most intensely exciting secrets which has ever engrossed its attention".³⁰⁰ What the nature of this secret is Poe never reveals, but to the very end Pym remains adamant that there is knowledge to which the human mind can gain access on the other side of the abyss.

In 'MS.' the voyage ends exactly as it began, with complete uncertainty. Trapped aboard the phantom-ship as she "thunders on to the southward with a velocity like the headlong dashing of a cataract",³⁰¹ the seafarer belatedly develops a "curiosity to penetrate

²⁹⁹ William Spengemann, *The Adventurous Muse: Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977) p 149.

³⁰⁰ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1134.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, p 198.

the mysteries”³⁰² of the “awful regions”³⁰³ he imagines he is travelling through. He speculates that the current the vessel is caught in may lead “to the southern pole itself”,³⁰⁴ an apparently “wild”³⁰⁵ supposition but one which now has “every probability in its favour”.³⁰⁶ However, for the narrator it is obvious that the “exciting knowledge”³⁰⁷ which awaits him at the Pole constitutes “some never-to-be-imparted secret”³⁰⁸ whose “attainment is destruction”.³⁰⁹ Like his last vision of the phantom-ship, “doomed to hover continually upon the brink of eternity, without taking its final plunge into the abyss”,³¹⁰ the reader cannot follow this narrator into the void.

Robert T. Tally Jr. has described ‘MS.’ as an “irreversible narrative”³¹¹ which depicts “a fall into an otherworldly maelstrom from which there is no return”.³¹² Unlike other fictional and non-fictional exploration accounts, which serve as “a model of knowledge production or scientific discovery, where the unknown becomes known through the narrative”,³¹³ Tally writes that in this tale “the mysteries observed remain unexplained”.³¹⁴ The reason for this is that the Gothic voyage it describes is not a passage through time or space, even a supernatural space. Indeed, if ‘MS.’ is an account of anything it is of the narrator’s irretrievable descent into the depths of his own crazed imagination. It is a representation of a mind’s one-way journey into a state of demonic fantasy.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid, p 197.

³¹¹ Robert T. Tally Jr., *Poe and the Subversion of American Literature: Satire, Fantasy, Critique* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p 52.

³¹² Ibid, p 53.

³¹³ Ibid, p 52.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

Accepting this interpretation of Poe's short tale, it can be argued that even though 'MS.' and *Arthur Gordon Pym* both feature Antarctic voyages the function of the South Pole in these works is markedly different. 'MS.' makes use of the imagery of the Symmesian vortices, but in this tale the South Pole represents the dead-end of all knowing, the complete and irrevocable collapse of the mind's ability to tell the real and the purely imaginary apart. Poe's very description of the Antarctic region, with its "stupendous ramparts of ice"³¹⁵ which resemble "the walls of the universe",³¹⁶ confirms that the narrator has reached the very boundary of human understanding and can go no further. As Stephen J. Pyne has written, in 'MS.' Antarctica "becomes a symbol not merely of the unexplored but of the unexplorable – a realm beyond the purview of reason".³¹⁷ This is why the narrator's 'discovery' necessarily implies his destruction.

Although Pym's account terminates before he discloses what lies at the Pole, it is an oversimplification to assume that *Arthur Gordon Pym* is another 'irreversible' narrative of the kind Tally describes. Pym has not lived to see his story published, the chapters which have been published remain enveloped in confusion, and its final sections may be lost forever, but this does not alter Pym's claim that he has completed a full account of his adventures. Wherever he has been for almost nine years, he has returned to describe the incidents "of a nature so entirely out of the range of human experience"³¹⁸ he alleges to have witnessed. As shall now be demonstrated, while 'MS.' uses the South Pole to symbolize the extent of what can be conveyed through language the Gothic Antarctica of *Arthur Gordon Pym*'s final chapter is one of Poe's most powerful metaphors for suggesting that reality may encompass more than we could ever have imagined possible.

³¹⁵ *Poetry and Tales*, p 198.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ Stephen J. Pyne, *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003), p 164.

³¹⁸ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1044.

Arthur Gordon Pym's magnificently haunting 25th chapter in which Pym approaches the Pole may be one of the shortest in the novel, but its length belies the intricacy of its structure and the exquisite strangeness of its imagery. Compared to this episode, Pym's earlier adventures suddenly seem mundane, even trivial. In thirteen brief paragraphs Poe does not so much bring his novel to a conclusion as gradually and completely transcend the narrative he has been writing up until then with a virtuoso display of his imaginative powers. Pym's time on Tsalal saw a return to the most primal of human situations. Faced with a landscape whose most basic features generate doubt and mystification he can only assign simple names to its phenomena, while all the time admitting that these give but the vaguest impression of what they are like. The Gothic reality of the Polar shroud exceeds even this degree of wondrous ambiguity.

Unlike the climactic scenes of 'MS.', in which the ghost ship is sucked into a "gigantic amphitheatre"³¹⁹ containing a monstrous whirlpool composed of "immense concentric circles"³²⁰ obviously inspired by the ideas of Symmes, the Gothic space of *Arthur Gordon Pym*'s final chapter is not derived from any speculative theories of Antarctic geography but is purely Poe's creation. An all-absorbing whiteness, it is "a region of novelty and wonder"³²¹ where forms of primordial simplicity are intriguingly combined with the suggestion of unimaginable complexity. The true brilliance of Poe's description lies in his subtle indication that beneath all of its strange phenomena there lies is some hidden pattern. Like the infinity of complex natural systems which make up the rest of the planet, Poe's south polar world clearly possesses an internal logic of its own which Pym, at least for the time being, cannot uncover.

When he first enters this Gothic space all Pym can perceive are the basic elements of sea, sky, a vast range of vapour, and the horizon, but as he moves closer the exact

³¹⁹ Ibid, p 199.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Ibid, p 1176.

arrangement of these components remains startlingly indistinct. Dragged onward by the irresistible current, he observes numerous forms of “unusual phenomena”:³²² the ocean rapidly heats up and turns milky white and vast amounts of white powder falls from above. He sees ethereal lights within the field of vapour, and notices that their “wild flickerings”³²³ have some peculiar correspondence to the “sudden agitations of the surface of the water”³²⁴ beneath his boat. In disquieting contrast to the entire monumental and uncanny spectacle, there persists a silence broken only by the occasional mystifying cry of ‘Tekeli-li’.

In reading the twenty-fifth chapter of *Arthur Gordon Pym*, it is essential to consider the question of exactly what Poe is going to such elaborate lengths to represent. ‘MS.’ comes to a delirious end when the narrator’s imagination exhausts itself as he reaches the Pole’s figurative point of oblivion. By contrast, what the final pages of the novel portray is the mind’s capacity to move beyond the known, a moment not of obliteration but of transcendence. Having confronted a multitude of horrors and been the victim of countless forms of treachery and deceit, Pym now heads due south to face the great uncertainty which lies at the South Pole. As Harold Beaver has written, in the novel’s “factitious dreamscape”³²⁵ the Pole “is transformed from some kind of geographical to an overwhelmingly spiritual prize”.³²⁶ In this way, Pym’s journey to the Antarctic ultimately becomes a metaphysical quest.

As Pym hurtles towards degree zero, the furthest extremity of the polar world assumes the form of a “gigantic curtain ranged along the whole extent of the southern horizon”.³²⁷ The known world becomes as obscure and insubstantial as a dream, and a

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid, p 1177.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ Harold Beaver, ed., *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, p 20.

³²⁶ Ibid, p 30.

³²⁷ *Poetry and Tales*, p 1179.

vastly different reality seems on the point of emerging. Instead of inspiring panic, all this only sharpens Pym's curiosity. He repeatedly questions the captive Tsalalian Nu-Nu, and this yields some startling facts about the group of islands they have just left behind. However, Pym knows that this intriguing information cannot compare with the unfolding marvels of the polar realm ("how can I *now* detain the reader?"³²⁸ with such matters, he teasingly asks). For Nu-Nu, a primitive creature who can only comprehend reality in the most literal terms, all this phantasmagoric phenomena inspires a terror so great it induces death, but Pym's response could not be more different.

Indeed, as he draws near the vast polar 'curtain' he finds himself barely feeling anything. Given the fantastical things he and Peters perceive, he admits that "it would seem reasonable that we should experience some alarm at the turn events were taking- but we felt none".³²⁹ The only thing he does experience is "a numbness of body and mind – a dreaminess of sensation".³³⁰ For one who has been rendered unconscious over and again and woken each time only to once more fall prey to the cryptic nature of reality, what Pym's listless 'dreaminess' represents is the clearing away of all concepts relating to the known world which has now faded from his view. On the very threshold of the South Pole, he must undergo this last 'sleep' before he awakens in another realm unimaginably stranger still.

However, what the novel then conjures up is much more than just the giant whirlpool Symmes envisaged. Almost impossible to visualize, what Pym beholds is a "limitless cataract",³³¹ but one which appears to flow into the sea from some distant point "in the heaven".³³² If this were not sufficiently fantastic, Poe brings things to a towering crescendo by rapidly unveiling two more images of staggeringly strangeness. As Pym

³²⁸ Ibid, p 1177.

³²⁹ Ibid, p 1178.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid, p 1179.

³³² Ibid.

approaches the summit of the cataract he catches sight of “wide, yawning, but momentary rents”³³³ within whose depths he can see “a chaos of flitting and indistinct images”.³³⁴ Giving himself up to the “embraces”³³⁵ of one of these chasms, Pym comes face to face with the gigantic human figure with skin as white as snow [Fig. 15, 16, 17].

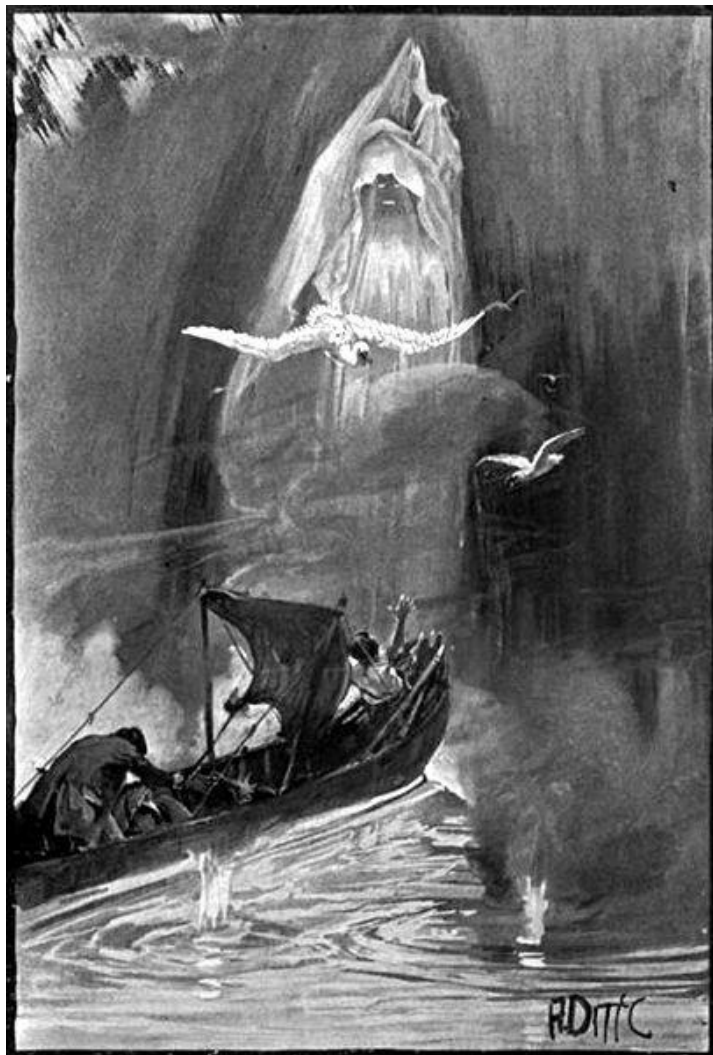


Fig. 15: The White Figure of the Pole: Illustration for Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* by A.D. McCormick (1898)

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.



**Fig. 16, 17: Two further artistic interpretations of the closing episode of Poe's novel, by
Jeremy Frederick (1902) and Alfred Kubin (1909)**

In conclusion, it was never going to be enough for Poe to bring Pym's narrative to a close by simply terminating it in the manner of 'MS.' or with a fictional projection of Symmes' 'hollow earth' theory. Instead of a place which has one great secret to disclose, his polar world is composed of a multitude of mysteries each more extraordinary than the last. If Tsalal's connection to the rest of nature was unclear, his Antarctic realm is quite literally an unearthly space more like the face of an alien world than anything to be found on our own. Here the forces of uncertainty and ambiguity which have tormented Pym throughout his voyage from Nantucket are revealed as constituting the natural order of reality. Therefore, Frederick S. Frank is correct in his observation that what Poe succeeds in doing in the novel is "revamping the boundaries of the gothic and testing the limits of fantasy in the vast amphitheatre of the whole earth".³³⁶

Returning to Barth and James's accusation that *Arthur Gordon Pym* is a text which 'means' nothing, it has now be shown that Poe's novel uses the tantalizing mystery of the Antarctic to formulate a mode of Gothic terror which acts as a complex metaphor for the incompleteness of humanity's understanding and its impulse to keep searching for some complete and absolute revelation. What the wondrously dazzling yet deeply enigmatic phenomena of *Arthur Gordon Pym*'s last chapter illustrate is the concept that the frontiers of knowledge are ever-changing, and that the only limit to what may exist is the limit of what we can imagine. Since the process of scientific discovery is boundless, Pym's conceptual search for the unreachable and the ineffable must necessarily end without resolution. His quest to solve the enigma of the South Pole, the last great unknown, only gives rise to countless new mysteries which lead him on into a new kind of reality.

As for the great shrouded phantom of the Pole which has so preoccupied Poe scholars and has generated a collection of interpretations almost as extensive as the novel

³³⁶ Frederick S. Frank, 'Introduction' to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, p 22.

has itself, this apparition may be viewed as Poe's symbolic representation of the incompleteness of human knowledge. It is the spectre of that haunting indeterminacy which has lured the human race on in its perpetual search for final explanations. The white phantom is indeed the artistic masterstroke of the entire novel, for what could be a stranger discovery amid the sublime desolation of the Antarctic, somewhere man has never been before, than a figure resembling a human? Therefore, the Gothic terror of *Arthur Gordon Pym* finally arises from the thought that the human struggle to know may be limitless, and that by solving mysteries science inevitably generates greater ones. Poe envisaged exploration as an inherently Gothic process, and by depicting the Pole as a place of total Otherness he created a new mode of Gothic literature.

Chapter Three:
“...that Magical Prison of Splendour and Glory...”:¹
Jules Verne’s *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*

¹ Jules Verne, *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm* Edited and Translated by Frederick Walter Paul (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), p 101.

Introduction

It is highly significant that in the course of his lengthy and astonishingly prolific career Jules Verne only ever wrote one critical essay, and the subject of that essay was Edgar Allan Poe. ‘Edgar Poe et ses Oeuvres’ [Edgar Poe and his Works] was published in the popular monthly educational magazine *Le Musée des Familles* [*The Family Museum*] in April 1864, when its author was 36 years old. The essay comprises four sections investigating different aspects of Poe’s imagination and his literary creations. After giving brief accounts of Poe’s life and times, his tales of ratiocination and pioneering use of cryptography, and his short stories describing imaginary voyages (specifically ‘MS. Found in a Bottle’ (1833) and ‘A Descent into the Maelström’ (1841)), Verne devotes all of the last and most substantial section to *Arthur Gordon Pym*.

In this he presents a detailed summary of Pym’s “amazing narrative”² of Antarctic exploration, emphasising many of its more fantastical Gothic features, such as the strange creature sighted floating upon the ice of the Southern Ocean, the “jet-black savages”³ of the island of Tsalal, and finally the towering white apparition of the polar abyss. Verne then proceeds to offer his own critical thoughts on *Arthur Gordon Pym*, a novel which he describes as belonging “far off the beaten path”⁴ of ordinary fiction, and full of “situations that aren’t found anywhere else”⁵ in literature. For Verne, *Arthur Gordon Pym* is a work which provides an abundant demonstration of Poe’s unusual powers as a writer: his incorporation of “obscure facts”⁶ into the fabric of his stories, the profound understanding of man’s “nervous, morbid temperaments”⁷ revealed in the “strange personalities”⁸ of his

² Ibid, p 383.

³ Ibid, p 382.

⁴ Ibid, p 379.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, p 384.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

protagonists, and above all his gift for producing “extraordinary tales”⁹ which situate the reader in the very midst of the “weird and uncanny”.¹⁰

Above all, what Verne sees as the defining trait of Poe’s approach to fiction is his capacity for inventing “impossible things”,¹¹ sensational events, grotesque characters and even entire wondrous worlds which are products of his imagination, but which successfully convince the reader that they might actually exist. He argues that it is the peculiar nature of fictions like *Arthur Gordon Pym* that, in spite of their outlandish and extravagant Gothic fantasy, they also possess “a realism that overwhelms the reader’s gullibility”.¹² In Verne’s assessment, Poe could create situations characterised by an absolute “newness”¹³ which touched upon things that lie “beyond comprehension”,¹⁴ and yet his works remained credible enough to persuade the reader that they could have a basis in reality. All this, Verne maintained, justified his view that the American writer created “a new form of literature”.¹⁵

After quoting in full the passages which make up the mysterious curtailed conclusion of *Arthur Gordon Pym*, Verne pauses one last time to consider what this “strange publication”¹⁶ now represents for any authors daring enough to venture into the same fictional territory Poe had been the first to enter. “Who will ever take it up again?”¹⁷ he asks rhetorically in reference to Pym’s story, before conceding that whoever does will have to be someone “more daring than I”.¹⁸ To continue on where even Poe himself seemed unable to go, to complete the narrative of this intrepid Antarctic explorer by imagining what befell him when he finally reached the South Pole and what became of him

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

afterwards, would in his estimation be a truly formidable undertaking. Feeling himself unworthy, Verne explains that this is a task which calls for a writer of a higher order of inventiveness, or as he phrases it “somebody bolder at pushing on into the realm of things impossible”.¹⁹

Moving forward 33 years to 1897, and Verne, by now one of the most famous and widely-read storytellers of his time [Fig. 18], published *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*. Here was the very continuation of Poe’s novel which Verne’s younger self had avowedly been incapable of producing. Therefore, the fact that *The Sphinx* came to be written at all begs an intriguing question: what occurred during the course of Verne’s creative life which so radically changed his mind and convinced him that he was capable of, as he put it, “filling in the gaps”²⁰ of Pym’s supremely strange narrative, a task even the great Poe had ‘declined’? To ask this question is, of course, to pose a series of interrelated questions: What was it that returned Verne’s imagination to Pym’s mystifying fate on the brink of the Pole at this late stage in his writing career? In what ways did the discourse of Antarctic discovery and perceptions of polar travel in general transform as the world prepared to enter the twentieth century, and how did these changes shape the Gothic landscapes of *The Sphinx*? Finally, what were Verne’s real artistic motivations in composing his continuation? The last of these questions shall be addressed in the second section of this chapter, but in order to consider the first two questions it is necessary to examine Verne’s wider interest in the Polar Regions and the role they came to play in his fiction before he wrote *The Sphinx*.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.



Fig.18: Portrait photograph of Jules Verne by C.Nadar, 1878

Section 1: “No, What You’re Doing is Useless! You’re at the Pole of the World!”:²¹

***The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, the Gothicisation of Arctic Exploration, and the
Terrors of ‘Polar Madness’**

From his astute analysis of *Arthur Gordon Pym* in ‘Edgar Poe et ses Oeuvres’ it is clear that the novel made a singular impression on the youthful Verne. In combining the conventions of a traditional seafaring adventure story with the remarkable new theme of a polar expedition and embellishing this work with a wealth of pseudoscientific yet verisimilar detail, Verne wrote that Pym’s Antarctic travel account skilfully built upon “the intriguing record of discoveries in those seas”,²² with Poe leaving it to the reader to judge the veracity of the phantasmagorical phenomena he describes in its later stages. Instead of remaining safely within the bounds of the familiar, Verne observed that the exceptional flair for conjuring up “tremendously powerful imagery”²³ which Poe had displayed in the novel’s early chapters was carried over into his depiction of “an exploratory push in the direction of the Pole”,²⁴ a terrifying Gothic voyage whose eventual destination is the complete unknown.

However, as pivotal an influence as *Arthur Gordon Pym* may have been in Verne’s conception of his *Voyages extraordinaires* [*Extraordinary Journeys*], the massive sequence of fantastic adventure stories which occupied him for the totality of his writing career, the second section of this chapter will reveal that *The Sphinx* is far more than simply Verne’s belated homage to his creative idol or an attempt to imaginatively outdo his literary precursor. It is certainly a misconception that it was Poe’s novel which originally led Verne to the rich theme of polar exploration. Although research into the Antarctic Regions

²¹ Jules Verne, *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, Translated by William Butcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p 337.

²² *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 381.

²³ Ibid, p 379.

²⁴ Ibid, p 381.

had stalled by the early 1840s, hazardous missions to the Northern Polar Regions had been taking place unceasingly since the beginning of the nineteenth century. As someone who possessed a fervid interest in travel and exploration from his earliest years, Verne keenly followed this activity, and read of Robert McClure's discovery of the Northwest Passage for Britain in 1854 and then of Francis Leopold McClintock's voyage in search of Sir John Franklin's lost Arctic expedition three years later.²⁵ In addition, Verne was especially captivated by reports about the succession of American Arctic explorers, including Elisha Kent Kane, Isaac Israel Hayes, and Charles Francis Hall, who edged further and further north from the 1850s onwards.

This boyhood enthusiasm developed into a lifelong curiosity about the great enigmatic spaces at either end of the earth. William Butcher has written that Verne was genuinely "fascinated by the polar regions",²⁶ and he argues that his preoccupation with these "last virgin areas of the globe"²⁷ was one which manifested itself constantly throughout his creative life. Verne's very first mature work of fiction, the novella *Wintering in the Ice*, appeared in 1855, and can be perceived as marking his inaugural engagement with the unfolding drama of polar exploration. Focusing on a desperate attempt to rescue a heroic sea captain who has gone missing after being swept into the dreaded Norwegian maelstrom (an early acknowledgement of Poe's influence on his own imaginary world), it would seem apparent that this simple but thrilling novella was intended to capitalize on the continuing interest surrounding the search for the Franklin expedition, which was launched by the British Admiralty back in 1848 and had begun to find evidence of its grisly fate shortly before Verne's tale was published. Substituting the pack ice of Greenland's subarctic seas for the treacherous Canadian Arctic coast where Franklin had actually vanished, *Wintering in the Ice* contained Verne's first depiction of a

²⁵ Peter Costello, *Jules Verne: Inventor of Science Fiction* (New York: Scribner, 1978), p 92.

²⁶ *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, p xiii.

²⁷ Ibid.

fearful frozen landscape: the dangers and horrors his characters endure include starvation and scurvy, living burial beneath collapsed ice, and in the finale, a deadly polar bear attack, the same combination of perils which many hypothesised had been responsible for the deaths of Franklin and his men.²⁸

Wintering in the Ice was full of gripping excitement, but it was mundane in comparison to Verne's next saga of snowbound adventure which appeared nine years later. Serialized between March 1864 (one month before 'Edgar Poe et ses Oeuvres') and December 1865 and published as a two-volume novel the following year, *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* [Fig. 19, 20] was the first of Verne's works to actually take one of the Polar Regions for its setting. Once again reflecting the ever-increasing concentration of explorers in the extreme northern latitudes at this historical juncture, the majority of the novel's action unfolds within the Arctic Circle. Like *Wintering in the Ice*, the story of *Captain Hatteras* is one of survival against incredible odds in a desolate and unforgiving environment where the human mind and body are pushed to extremes. In this respect, at a basic level it can be interpreted as a fictional reaction to the sensational narratives of contemporary figures like Elisha Kane and Isaac Hayes, both of whom published bestselling accounts of their journeys.²⁹ However, in *Captain Hatteras* Verne not only anticipates the course of Arctic exploration by depicting a fierce global race to the North Pole. He goes even further, by imagining the kind of grand figure who would come to dominate polar exploration in the following century.

²⁸ Anthony Brandt, *The Man Who Ate His Boots: Sir John Franklin and the Tragic History of the Northwest Passage* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011), p 6.

²⁹ Elisha Kent Kane, *Arctic Explorations: The Second Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin, in the Years 1853- 55* (Philadelphia: Child's and Peterson, 1856) and Isaac Israel Hayes, *The Open Polar Sea: A Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery Towards the North Pole in the Schooner 'United State's* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867).



Fig. 19: Artwork for the first instalment of Verne's *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1865)

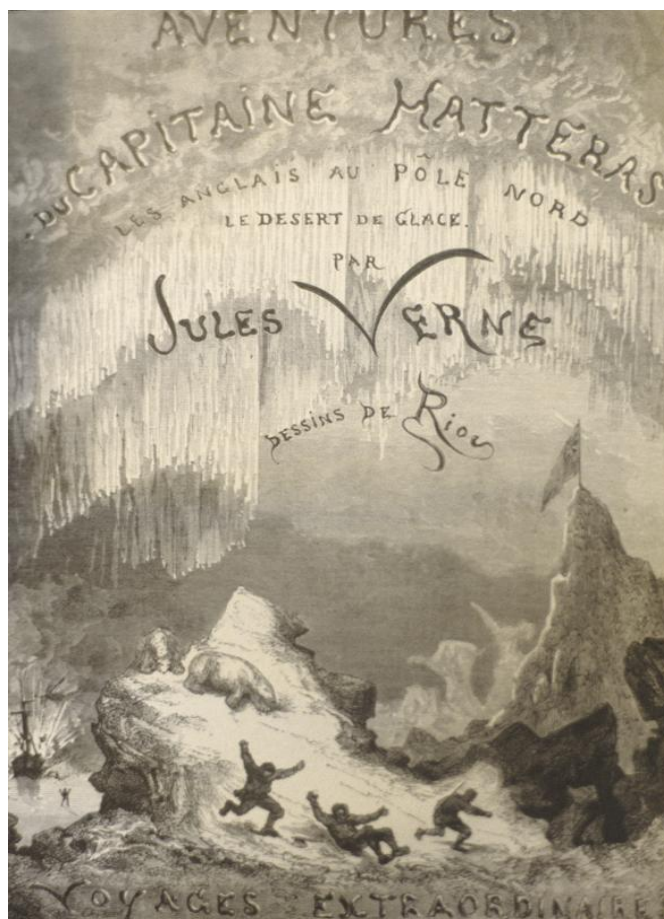


Fig. 20: Édouard Riou's artwork for the first book edition of Verne's *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* (1866)

Initially the novel's protagonist, the millionaire British mariner John Hatteras [Fig. 21], seems to be the living incarnation of unfailing rationality and dispassionate pragmatism. Verne goes to some lengths to reinforce this impression, describing Hatteras as an individual “endowed with a temperament to resist anything”³⁰ and “a type never to retreat”.³¹ A natural leader, the captain stands firm in his belief that there “are no impossible obstacles”,³² merely “stronger and weaker wills”.³³ He is also zealously patriotic, a “bold character”³⁴ who “carried British pride high”³⁵ and is determined to ensure that “all geographical discoveries were made by his compatriots”.³⁶ In one of his rousing addresses Hatteras explains that “[a]s a Briton I will not allow – we will not allow – others to gain the glory of going further north. If ever a human foot is to tread the Pole, it has to be a British foot!”³⁷

³⁰ *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, p72.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, p 325.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, p 75.

³⁵ Ibid, p 72.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, p71.



Fig. 21: Captain Hatteras. Illustration by Riou

Only as the journey progresses are the other sides of Hatteras's personality exposed. In the early stages of the voyage he stays out of sight, having initially led his crew to believe that its purpose is to locate the Northwest Passage. Once civilization has been left behind Hatteras assumes personal command, and divulges that reaching the Pole is not an incidental object of his expedition but has always been its one true aim. Since he claims that the British were responsible for originally opening up the Arctic, Hatteras now

portrays himself as duty-bound to defend his nation's honour from the encroaching 'Yankees' (explorers like Kane and Hayes, who in the novel are combined into the character of the lost American explorer Altamont), and to "crown the series of British discoveries with an endeavour of the highest renown".³⁸ Later on, even this patriotic fervour is shown to be partially deceptive. Now something which transcends concerns about scientific curiosity and even personal glory, for Hatteras the act of reaching the Pole has become indivisibly bound up with his own identity, the key to his essential nature.

If the basic plot of *Wintering in the Ice* was inspired by the search for Franklin, in *Captain Hatteras* Verne draws once more upon the details of the tragedy but in a much more inventive fashion. Like Hatteras, Franklin was a figure whose determination to conquer the northern latitudes came at a terrible human cost. On his earlier Arctic expedition of 1819-1822, the British explorer had commanded a mostly non-English crew made up of sailors who normally worked in the fur and oil trades, precisely like the one Verne's protagonist assembles. In the course of this mission, Franklin's authority faltered as food supplies were exhausted and threats of mutiny and suspicions of cannibalism arose. Less than half of those who served him survived. Even though this journey had been an unqualified disaster and a national embarrassment, Franklin undertook several more voyages to the extreme north before leading an expedition to complete the charting of the Northwest Passage in 1845. Chosen to be the officer who would boldly conclude this grand feat of discovery, neither he nor his crew of 129 men were seen alive again.

Notoriously, several of the search parties which went looking for this expedition found abundant evidence of poor planning and also signs that the men under Franklin's command had again resorted to what Charles Dickens described as the "last resource",³⁹ and were reduced to cannibalism. In other words, the legacy of what had been expected to

³⁸ Ibid, p73.

³⁹ Quoted in Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber, 1996), p 125.

be the culmination of Britain's great achievement in these regions was a gruesome horror story which dragged on for over twenty years. The implications of the Franklin tragedy not only had a shattering effect on mid-nineteenth century attitudes: the lost expedition became what Catherine Lanone has termed "a topos of textual haunting",⁴⁰ which deeply influenced subsequent literary representations of the Polar Regions. It reinforced the view of polar exploration as an enterprise inexorably poised on the brink of catastrophe, a perception fundamental to *Captain Hatteras*. Furthermore, Verne's gothicised Arctic wilderness closely matches the image of these latitudes as what Glyndwr Williams has termed "a nightmarish labyrinth in which ships and men disappeared without a trace",⁴¹ which the massive and protracted search for Franklin created in the popular imagination.

To the horror of his crew, it emerges that like Franklin before him, Hatteras has also made two previous failed attempts to fulfil what he describes as "the aim of his life".⁴² The first of these was a "rash adventure"⁴³ which saw Hatteras's ship become trapped in field ice at the seventy-fourth parallel, with the result that many of his crew "underwent atrocious suffering"⁴⁴ before their leader reluctantly set a course for British shores. Although it succeeded in reaching the seventy-sixth parallel, Hatteras's second polar voyage proved to be an even greater catastrophe when his vessel was once again caught in the unrelenting grip of an ice field. Marooned at the summit of the earth for an entire winter, the cold was so horrendous that "not a single man saw Britain again",⁴⁵ with the

⁴⁰ Catherine Lanone, 'Monsters on the Ice and Global Warming: from Mary Shelley and Sir John Franklin to Margaret Atwood and Dan Simmons' in Andrew Smith and William Hughes ed. *EcoGothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p 29.

⁴¹ Glyndwr Williams, *Arctic Labyrinth: The Quest for the Northwest Passage* (London: Penguin Allen Lane, 2009), p 6.

⁴² *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, p73.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p 74.

sole exception of Hatteras himself, who was “brought back by a Danish whaler after a trek of more than two hundred miles across the ice”.⁴⁶

Undaunted by these terrible failures, Hatteras is more determined than ever to be the first to the Pole. As his ship, the ‘Forward’ (the brig Kane used for his pioneering Arctic survey had been called the ‘Advance’), moves ever northward, he remains utterly defiant in face of its dwindling fuel supply, scurvy, and the other “incalculable sufferings”⁴⁷ he knowingly inflicts on his crew. He is equally unperturbed by the ever-more fantastic geographical obstacles presented by the Arctic latitudes [**Fig. 22**]. Even when all but three of his crew commit mutiny and Hatteras’s ship is engulfed in an explosion, leaving him without supplies in an unmapped desert of ice, he is compelled interminably onward as though he is subject to an “irresistible force”.⁴⁸ Verne emphasises the strange affinity between the nature of the captain and that of his goal, repeatedly describing Hatteras as “[F]irm”,⁴⁹ “unshakable”,⁵⁰ and “immutably fixed”,⁵¹ much like the point of absolute motionlessness around which “every other point turns”⁵² which he relentlessly seeks. As if the rest of the material world were suddenly nothing but a meaningless illusion, Hatteras marches on to the eternal Pole which for him has now become the centre of all reality.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p 173.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p 153.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p 128.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, p 133.

⁵² Ibid.



Fig. 22: Hatteras's ship off the Arctic coast

Francis Spufford has suggested that Hatteras is primarily a caricature of those unstoppable British imperialists who overran the Earth at the height of Victoria's reign, a task they performed with matchless efficiency supposedly thanks to their intrinsic inhumanity, and whom Verne rightfully predicted would once again apply themselves to the farthest reaches of the Arctic Regions now that the Northwest Passage had been discovered. He writes that it was already common for French authors to depict Anglo Saxons as what he calls "monsters of reason"⁵³ who were "scarcely flesh and blood at all",⁵⁴ but he argues that Verne takes this even further and portrays the unfeeling, superhuman Hatteras as a kind of robot. Apparently impervious to the intense Arctic conditions, the ravages of disease, and the agonies of thirst and hunger, this unnatural

⁵³ *I May Be Some Time*, p 273.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

figure strides ahead seemingly oblivious to his astonishing surroundings, a mechanical man with a heart as cold as the icy world he almost seems to have been created to conquer [Fig. 23].



Fig. 23: Captain Hatteras surveys the Arctic landscape. Illustration by Riou

Although there is considerable justification for this interpretation of Hatteras's extreme nature, it can equally be argued that the recklessly compulsive personality of Verne's archetypal polar explorer resulted from his discovery of Poe. *Wintering in the Ice* contains no figure comparable to Hatteras, but between the appearance of this novella and

the first instalment of Verne's Arctic novel came the publication of Baudelaire's translation *Les Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym* [*The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*] in 1857. With its depiction of its protagonist caught in the unshakable attractive power of the South Pole and bent upon getting there whatever the cost, *Arthur Gordon Pym* is also a probable source for Verne's conception of Hatteras as a man haunted by an *idée fixe*, the transcendent vision of reaching the centre of the Arctic which dictates his every waking thought and action.

As someone who had developed what Butcher terms a "polar obsession"⁵⁵ of his own, it is not difficult to see how Poe's representation of an explorer with a monomaniacal desire to access the innermost recesses of the Antarctic must have struck a chord with Verne. Like Pym, Hatteras is fixated with the notion that there must be habitable land at the Pole, a perfectly untouched point which it is his destiny alone to find. Bridget Behrmann has noted that unlike his loyal follower Dr. Clawbonny, a polymath who personifies what she terms the "heroics of knowledge"⁵⁶ and whose curiosity about the Arctic is linked to his wider positivistic scheme to convert everything in the universe into a network of practical information, Hatteras is an "absolute hero"⁵⁷ totally consumed with eradicating the space which separates him from what Behrmann calls "*le point supreme*",⁵⁸ the cataclysmic polar abyss. In the second part of the novel the last vestiges of Hatteras's humanity fade away along with the qualities which endowed him with the stature of a romantic adventurer, and he emerges as a truly Gothic and grotesque figure. Silent, unsleeping, and uncannily inanimate whenever his progress is suspended, Verne describes

⁵⁵ *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, p xiv.

⁵⁶ Bridget Behrmann, "Éclat: Duality and the Absolute in *Voyages et aventures du Capitaine Hatteras*" *Verniana: Jules Verne Studies*, Vol 7 (2014-15), p 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

Hatteras as a man who “lived with a single idea, which could be summed up in just three words: the North Pole”.⁵⁹

Speculating about the nature of the captain’s “strange mania”,⁶⁰ Dr. Clawbonny concludes that his “singular obstinacy”⁶¹ is a form of “polar madness”,⁶² a known condition recognised as incurable. However, Hatteras’s Arctic mania seems as much the result of falling victim to what Poe termed the ‘Imp of the Perverse’, the same overwhelming inclination to act contrary to the dictates of reason and our natural instinct for self-preservation, which also afflicted his polar traveller Pym. Just as Pym, dangling from the edge of a precipice on the island of Tsalal, cannot behold the abyss below him without admitting that he feels “a longing to fall; a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable”,⁶³ Hatteras is completely under the sway of the deadly influence of the Pole and seems not to care that he will almost certainly die in the process of attaining it.

Marie-Hélène Huet has argued that like *Arthur Gordon Pym*, *Captain Hatteras* and *The Sphinx* are texts united by more than simply their engagement with “the mythical fascination of polar conquest”.⁶⁴ Instead, she proposes that Verne’s polar novels must be considered as works which interrogate the rhetoric which masked the often “disastrous events”⁶⁵ of recent polar exploration history. Huet maintains that by depicting such expeditions as hopeless struggles between the destructive force of human ambition and the deadly conditions found in these regions, Verne depicts man’s natural limitations and the frailty of his power over his physical environment.

⁵⁹ *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, p 139.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p 349.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

⁶² *Ibid*.

⁶³ Edgar Allan Poe, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* in Quinn, Patrick F., ed., *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales* (New York: Library of America, 1984), p 1170.

⁶⁴ Marie-Hélène Huet, “*Winter Lights: Disaster, Interpretation and Jules Verne’s Polar Novels*” *Verniana: Jules Verne Studies*, Vol 2 (2009-2010), p 157.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p 175.

While all the other characters in the novel recognise the limits of what is humanly possible, this idea means nothing to Hatteras. As Henri Zukowski has written, “Without a doubt John Hatteras is a compass, a magnetic needle pointing to the Pole. In all evidence his only interest is this fixed point, that is his destination, his destiny, his desire; he needs this base; he has to come full circle, to guarantee the meaning, he is firmly decided to continue this venture to the end”.⁶⁶ Like the force of magnetism which holds sway over the entire physical universe, Hatteras’s will is unchangeable, and he cannot retreat even in face of inevitable oblivion. As Zukowski observes, “John Hatteras is absolutely determined to discover the Pole because he is already defined by the Pole, it’s in this sense that he could be called a compass”.⁶⁷ In other words, Hatteras is not merely just one who seeks the North Pole: in his visions of things, he is the North Pole.

The true extent of Hatteras’s monomaniacal lunacy, and the degree to which he too has been “caught up in the vertiginous attraction of the abyss”,⁶⁸ only becomes manifest in the final chapters of Verne’s novel. Discovering that the exact geographical Pole lies at the centre of an active volcano [**Fig. 24**], Hatteras becomes empowered with “the strength and skill particular to madmen”⁶⁹ and makes a demented bid to hoist the British flag there, responding to his allies desperate pleas to turn back with the same laconic phrase “I shall go”.⁷⁰ As a figure whom Verne has increasingly “presented in supernatural terms”,⁷¹ to use Butcher’s words, it is at this point that Hatteras attempts to enter into a strange Gothic union with the Pole itself, to embrace the fantastically destructive natural force which he has inexorably pursued his entire life.

⁶⁶ Henri Zukowski ‘Boussoles’ in Christian Chelebourg ed. *Jules Verne 6: “Le Science en question”* (Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1992), p 157. “Point de doute, John Hatteras est une boussole, une aiguilles aimantée pointant le pôle. De toute évidence, il n’a d’intérêt que pour le point fixe, c’est là sa destination, son destin, son désir; il a besoin de cette assise; il lui faut boucler la boucle, certifier le sens, il est fermement décidé à mener cette entreprise à bien”.

⁶⁷ Ibid. “John Hatteras est tout à fait décidé à découvrir le pôle parce qu’il peut être dit boussole”.

⁶⁸ *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, p 338.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p 337.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p 339.

⁷¹ Ibid, p xxiii.

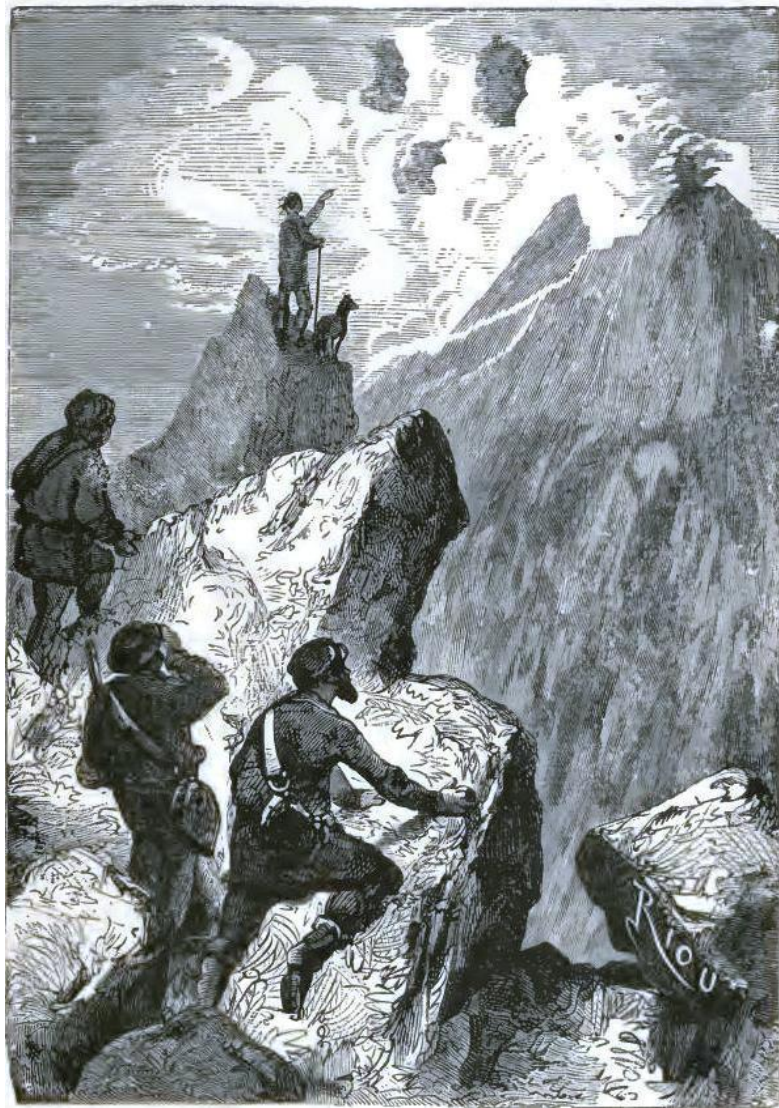


Fig. 24: The Polar Volcano

Indeed, in the original version of *Captain Hatteras* Verne concludes his story with the explorer surging ahead beyond the reach of his companions, only to be caught in a huge eruption and cast into the molten heart of the volcano. In the published version Hatteras is restrained from leaping into the lava, but his Gothic fate is no less complete. Now a catatonic shell divested of all reason (or “a poor body without a soul”,⁷² as Verne describes him), he is brought back to England where he is incarcerated in an asylum. Before departing the Arctic, Hatteras’s comrades build a cairn at his landing point on the

⁷² Ibid, p 349.

coast and inscribe the great explorer's name and the year upon one of the stones. As Clawbonny explains, this cairn stands as a symbol of the truth that "we have saved only Hatteras's body. His soul has remained at the summit of the volcano!"⁷³ The animating principle which brought the captain to the very ends of the earth has left him, and has now fused forever with the eternal polar fire [Fig. 25].



Fig. 25: Captain Hatteras meets his destiny

⁷³ Ibid.

Section 2: “This Unknown Land, this New Ground...”:⁷⁴ The Extreme North, the Far South, and the Folly of the Polar Quest in the Vernian Imagination

In the same way that there are many indicators that the Gothic pathology of Verne's hero found its origin in that of Poe's Antarctic explorer, the polar regions of *Captain Hatteras* are also clearly reminiscent of those described in *Arthur Gordon Pym*, and are based as much on the unfolding topography of the far south as that of the frozen north. In 'Edgar Poe et ses Oeuvres' Verne acknowledged the particular ingenuity the American writer had displayed in augmenting the known facts about the Antarctic in constructing his own Gothic region of novelty and wonder. It has been demonstrated that Verne similarly made extensive use of a rich variety of Arctic exploration accounts (principally those of John Ross, James Clark Ross, William Scoresby, and William Edward Parry) to give his work a scrupulous plausibility.⁷⁵ At the same time, Verne also stresses the startling strangeness of the polar landscape by incorporating such otherworldly details as blood-red snow (a result of microscopic fungi, which John Ross and several others had reported), the terrifying illusions and confounding mirages common to this polar zone [Fig. 26, 27], as well as the distorting effects associated with the “white sickness”,⁷⁶ the result of the intense Arctic glare. However, when Hatteras crosses into the extreme northern latitudes the world he enters gradually transforms into a place of fantastical invented phenomena.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p 226.

⁷⁵ Butcher provides a comprehensive list of the works of polar exploration literature, by both English and French authors, which Verne used as source material when composing the novel, *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, p xiv-xvi. For a detailed analysis of Verne's imaginative adaptation of his source materials, see Marie-Hélène Huet, “Winter Lights: Disaster, Interpretation and Jules Verne's Polar Novels”

⁷⁶ Ibid, p 170.

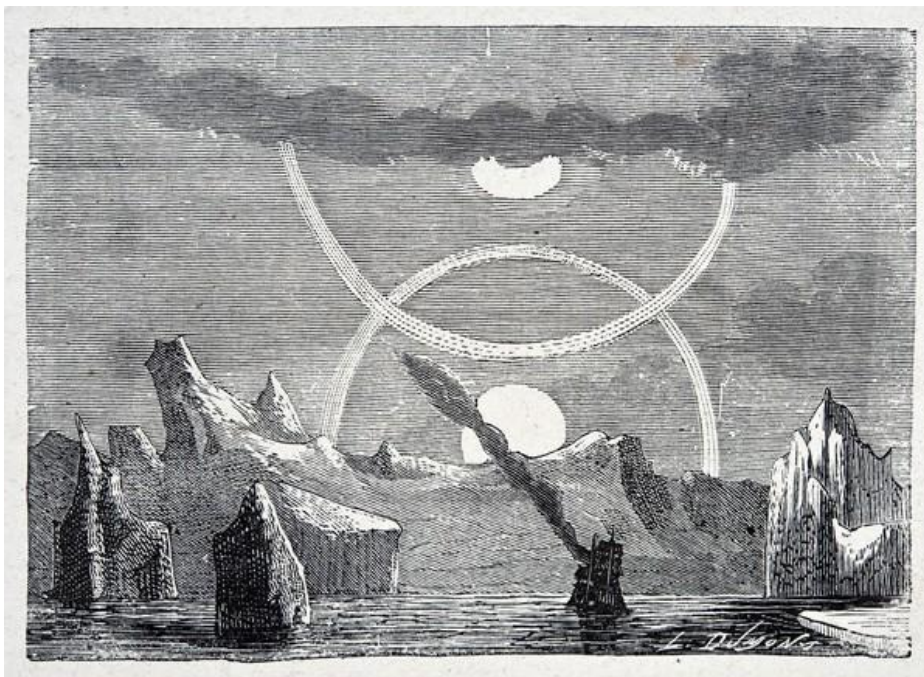


Fig. 26, 27: Polar Optical Illusions in Captain Hatteras

Whether it was Poe who brought his ideas to Verne's attention or not, there can be little doubt that John Cleves Symmes's 'hollow earth' theory was as pivotal to the depiction of the Polar Regions in *Captain Hatteras* as it was to those in *Arthur Gordon Pym*. Verne even makes a direct reference to Symmes in chapter 24 of the novel, as

Hatteras and his companions prepare for their climactic assault on the Pole. Discussing what they may hope to find, Dr. Clawbonny mentions Symmes by name and explains that “it has been claimed that immense openings exist at the Poles...through which one could go to the interior of the globe”.⁷⁷ As observed in chapter two, Symmes had proposed an expedition to the internal world by way of the hole at the Arctic Pole in 1818, and this notion famously provided Verne with the premise for one of the most celebrated of all his works, *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth*, which was published the same year as *Captain Hatteras* in 1864. Ironically, by this late stage in the book another of Symmes’s main assertions has already been proven correct. Three chapters earlier, Hatteras and his followers cross the last great frozen expanse of the northern latitudes and on reaching the other side behold a polar ocean teeming with a multitude of gigantic sea creatures. Almost free of ice, Hatteras is convinced that this ocean must lead all the way to the geographic North Pole.

As discussed in chapter two, the crucial question of whether there were open polar seas and warm temperatures at the earth’s axes had been central to the inception of the United States Exploring Expedition, and to Pym’s overwhelming determination to continue voyaging south in Poe’s novel. This variety of speculation was just as integral to the debate over the feasibility of expansion into the extreme north. On his return to America in 1855, Michael F. Robinson writes that Kane had sought to “overcome his poor performance in the Arctic and gain wide acclaim as a scientific hero”.⁷⁸ Distracting the public from the inconclusive results of his attempt to identify what had befallen Franklin, Kane caused a sensation when he reported that he had instead discovered what he was certain was a clear, iceless sea containing many species of whales, fish and birds off the coast of Greenland, just beyond the latitude of 80° north. Having apparently confirmed this key aspect of

⁷⁷ Ibid, p 331.

⁷⁸ Michael F. Robinson, *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p 13.

Symmes's doctrine and located a sea route to the North Pole, Kane's expedition became what Robinson terms the first great "popular success"⁷⁹ of U.S. polar exploration. It led to an influx of American explorers into the Arctic including Hayes, who corroborated Kane's mistaken account as part of his falsified claim to have set a record for furthest north in 1861.

In Verne's novel, this open polar ocean (which bears the name Kane Sound) is the means by which Hatteras makes his final approach to his goal. However, everything which he encounters beyond this point is a transmogrified version of the features of the Antarctic regions as they had been partially established in fact, projected by pseudoscience, and as Poe had depicted them in his Gothic fiction. Using imagery which closely resembles that of the final, hallucinatory chapter of *Arthur Gordon Pym*, Verne describes Hatteras's crossing of an uncanny polar ocean characterised by much "extraordinary and inexplicable phenomena".⁸⁰ He and his companions observe that the sea has become "smooth and calm"⁸¹ while the sky becomes "strangely luminous",⁸² as they pass through "a region of electric light"⁸³ hearing only "the sinister cries of birds".⁸⁴ The waters in this "luminous sphere"⁸⁵ soon erupt in violent swells and "deep chasms",⁸⁶ which to the "frenzied minds"⁸⁷ of Hatteras's followers are a sign, an incontrovertible "interdiction to go any further"⁸⁸ as though it were nature's own "wish to forbid access to the Pole".⁸⁹ Hatteras's small boat is then dragged into "a circular hole, a new Maelstrom",⁹⁰ a combination of a

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, p 317.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p 318.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p 319.

Symmesian vortex and Poe's Antarctic abyss, and is sucked into the swirling black depths of this watery "pit".⁹¹

Having narrowly avoided drowning in the Arctic maelstrom, Hatteras then discovers the northern landmass whose existence he has been inexplicably certain of, and Verne continues to superimpose the speculative geography of the South Polar Regions upon those of the North. Like Pym at the other end of the world, what Hatteras has found is a dark and desolate island, one which also seems a portent of doom from the moment it is sighted. Even though they are overcome by a "thirst of the unknown",⁹² his companions cannot help but notice how "every creature that dwelled in that part of the globe"⁹³ instinctively flees from this "land at the Pole",⁹⁴ as though it inspires in them "a feeling of revulsion"⁹⁵ as powerful as the mesmeric influence which mysteriously compels Hatteras towards it.

Foolishly overlooking these warning signs the explorers then investigate the island, which Hatteras names Queen's Island in the same manner that James Clark Ross had named a vast section of the Antarctic coastline in honour of Queen Victoria in 1841. As already noted, Queen's Island is dominated by the fiery cone of a great volcano, which "stands like a beacon at the North Pole of the world".⁹⁶ This towering geographical feature is clearly an imaginative conflation of Mount Erebus and Mount Terror, the volcanic peaks of the large island (the southernmost island which can be reached by sea) which Ross had also discovered on the same voyage. Verne even makes reference to the "fire-breathing mountains on the southern continent"⁹⁷ observed by "our illustrious countryman

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid, p 318.

⁹³ Ibid, p 315.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p 321.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Commodore James Ross”,⁹⁸ in order to lend credence to the idea that the North Pole itself might be found not on frozen land but located inside “a wide open flaming crater”,⁹⁹ which continually spews “a mass of burning boulders and slabs of glowing rock”,¹⁰⁰ a notion which can be traced back as far as the polar maps of Kircher.

Instead of a territorial objective to be measured and charted like any other, Verne portrays the quest for the Pole as symbolic of man’s impulse to undertake projects which appear beyond his capabilities but which he pursues nonetheless, an insatiable urge to achieve the seemingly impossible. A storyteller who was “fixated on reaching the ends of the world”,¹⁰¹ by means of his fiction, Butcher argues that for Verne the geographic Pole amounts to a “miraculous spot”,¹⁰² in his novels because it “uniquely opposes two-dimensional space, casts off the linear straightjacket, denies the binary maze, and indeed collapses all structure”.¹⁰³ Butcher proposes that in Verne’s imagination it was the Pole’s thaumaturgic capacity to combine “an Ultima Thule, a geographical limiting point, [and] a magical place to linger”,¹⁰⁴ which to some extent explained “the madness haunting those who venture into such domains”.

Although *Captain Hatteras*, much like Poe’s novel, superficially conforms to the structure of a traditional adventure story, this correspondence is similarly undermined by its irresolute ending at the Pole. Sarah Capitanio has observed that “[n]early all Vernian texts ultimately work towards a central solution and resolution”,¹⁰⁵ a narratological focal point for the various strands of the plot and one which gives a definite meaning to the fantastic ordeal which his characters have undergone. However, *Captain Hatteras* is a

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p 340.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p xxi.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p xxii.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Sarah Capitanio, ‘*Lilci-bas*’ and ‘*L’Au-delà*’...but Not as they Knew it’: Realism, Utopianism and Science Fiction in the Novels of Jules Verne in Edmund Smith ed. *Jules Verne: Narratives of Modernity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), p 65.

striking anomaly in this respect, for although claiming the Pole promises to bring about just such a total resolution this is a complete deception. Instead of crowning his glorious triumph over the Arctic continent by waving the Union Jack inside the volcanic bowels of Mount Hatteras, Verne's protagonist is rendered irrevocably dumb before he can make it to the Pole's precise location [Fig. 28]. In this way, the Pole's physical inaccessibility stands as a metaphorical figuration of its ineffability, the truth that it finally has a greater reality as metaphysical ideal rather than as an actual geographical point. As in *Arthur Gordon Pym*, the act of reaching it seems to extend the possibility of gaining something even greater than perfect knowledge, the means of achieving a Gothic amalgamation of the individual with the absolute, but Hatteras is merely left a mindless invalid.



Fig. 28: The catatonic Captain Hatteras after reaching the Pole

Since *Captain Hatteras* once again portrays the Pole as a transcendent, unobtainable objective, and one which leads those who seek it either to oblivion or hopeless insanity, the image of polar exploration itself which emerges from Verne's novel is of the most grandiose of follies. For all the vast resources at his disposal, his skill and determination as a mariner, and his prowess as a leader, Hatteras is finally neither a Cook, a Franklin nor a Ross, not one who has risked everything to illuminate the darkest corners of the earth for the benefit of humanity but a figure who has senselessly perverted the noble project of exploration into something ruinous and futile. Although Verne's novel is set in the Arctic, it imparts an unequivocal message which can be extended to both Polar Regions: the geographic Poles are places which science cannot prepare us for and are far deadlier than anywhere mankind has yet ventured. The ambition to search for them is clear proof of madness, for it can only result in prolonged torment for all and a lonely death for many.

Section 3: “...Beyond Latitude 84° South...”:¹⁰⁶ Polar Science and Verne’s Revival of the Antarctic Gothic

To return to the main question posed at the outset of this section, it would seem incontrovertible that Verne’s composition of this earlier Gothic polar fiction (the first instalment of which appeared only a month before his essay praising *Arthur Gordon Pym*) was one of the main factors which eventually led him to reassess the bewildering conclusion of Poe’s novel and set to work on the sequel he believed the book called for. In the same manner that Poe had used exploration’s first concerted efforts to investigate the Antarctic as the starting point for a Gothic work of spiralling intrigue and profound mystery, with *Captain Hatteras* Verne had seized upon the earth’s increasingly contested northernmost regions to produce a parallel narrative of cataclysmic Arctic terror. Having begun the *Voyages extraordinaires*, his exhaustive fictional mapping of the globe, with Hatteras’s demented quest to conquer the North Pole, what more fitting culmination could Verne have devised for this sequence of adventures than to revisit Poe’s imaginary Antarctic voyage, this time taking the reader to those places lying beyond the point of Pym’s narratological collapse: the ethereal realms of the South Pole?

As we have seen, in *Captain Hatteras* Verne projected a Gothicised topography, derived from *Arthur Gordon Pym* and the accounts of various polar travellers, onto the blank spaces of the extreme north. Moreover, since Verne constructed the novel’s uncanny Arctic wilderness by drawing upon the emerging details of the Antarctic and the trope of the geographical Pole as what David Standish terms an ideal “mysterious place”¹⁰⁷ more typically associated with the far south, there is some justification for considering it a disguised example of Antarctic Gothic fiction. For Butcher, the “greater and greater

¹⁰⁶ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 162.

¹⁰⁷ David Standish, *Hollow Earth: The Long and Curious History of Imagining Strange Lands, Fantastical Creatures, Advanced Civilizations, and Marvellous Machines Below the Earth’s Surface* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: De Capo Press, 2006), p 116.

invention”¹⁰⁸ Verne displays as he creates “the multi-dimensional space of an imaginary world”¹⁰⁹ in the second half of *Captain Hatteras*, along with the “hypnotic mood”¹¹⁰ and “unreal atmosphere”¹¹¹ evoked by his Arctic landscape, all attest to the influence of Poe’s depiction of the Antarctic regions. Having adapted Poe’s method for creating a strange white world once in *Captain Hatteras*, Verne would now use it again to trace Pym’s footsteps into the Antarctic void.

It is equally probable that Verne was spurred into writing *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm* [Fig. 29] by the sudden acceleration of polar exploration itself. By the time he set himself the challenge of writing his response to Poe’s novel, new developments in the far south were fully in progress. Two years earlier in 1895 the Norwegian sailor Carsten Borchgrevink learned of the honours which had been lavished on his fellow countryman Fridtjof Nansen, after Nansen reached latitude 86° 14', a new record for Farthest North. Already an advocate of Antarctic exploration, Borchgrevink was eager to reproduce Nansen’s achievement in the southern hemisphere. As part of the crew of a Norwegian whaling ship named the ‘Antarctic’, he had navigated the Ross Sea and was one of a small number of sailors who made it ashore onto Victoria Land. With this act, the voyage of the ‘Antarctic’ both overturned Ross’s record for Furthest South and showed the way for future expeditions.

¹⁰⁸ *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, pxxv.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p xxiii.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p xxi.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*.

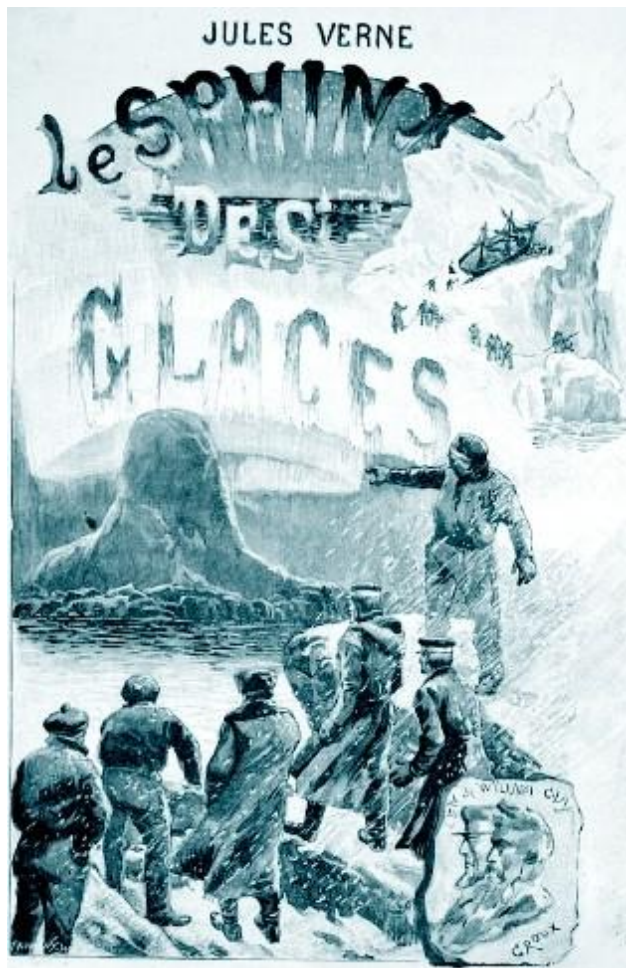


Fig. 29: Artwork for the first book edition of Verne's *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm* (1897) by George Roux

Borchgrevink next set his sights on the South Pole, and returned to Europe to raise funds for a private expedition which he would lead. Although he was one of only a handful of men who had actually set foot upon the Antarctic continent at that point, Borchgrevink made an astute realisation. To obtain the investment he needed, he would have to provide not simply a factual account of his time in the far south but a story which would draw attention to his cause. Before he obtained the backing for his expedition three years later, Borchgrevink made ever-more sensational claims about what he believed lay undiscovered in the Antarctic Regions, one of which was curiously reminiscent of *Arthur Gordon Pym* and its lost polar tribes. David Day has written that among the many goals of his expedition, Borchgrevink alleged that it would investigate “the possibility of finding native

people in the Antarctic”.¹¹² More than fifty years had passed since the return of Ross, but even in the age of modern science the Antarctic realms could still be made to support the wildest of conjectures.

Showing that they would not be discouraged by Borchgrevink’s possessive attitude to the extreme south, Germany and Belgium both made plans for surveys of their own. The Arctic explorer and geophysicist Erich von Drygalski also did much to bolster interest in the Antarctic by proposing that there were secrets which the science of magnetism could only uncover in these regions, an idea which plays a important role in *The Sphinx*. Therefore, three decades after he chronicled Hatteras’s ill-fated journey to the Arctic Ultima Thule, Verne must have recognised that it was now the far south which awaited imminent disclosure. In the years since the publication of *Captain Hatteras* successive American, British, and Scandinavian expeditions had thoroughly charted the Arctic Regions, removing its unknown spaces until only the North Pole itself was left to be vanquished. By contrast, the Antarctic continent had only begun to be explored with the same determination. Nonetheless, it was evident that it would not remain a *terra incognita* of this kind for much longer. Frederick Paul Walter has argued that Nansen’s “huge strides in the [A]rctic”¹¹³ must have convinced Verne that similar feats would soon be performed in the South Polar Regions, and that mankind had truly embarked upon “the final chapter in geographic discovery”.¹¹⁴ If Verne was ever to write his own ending to Poe’s story, now was unquestionably the time.

Verne had already utilized the lens of Gothic fiction to project how this form of ultimate journey could descend into catastrophe. As a text *Captain Hatteras* both looked back to the recent past of Ross’s Antarctic expedition, the disappearance of Franklin, and the voyage of Elisha Kane and also foreshadowed the actual course of Antarctic discovery

¹¹² David Day, *Antarctica: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p 105.

¹¹³ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p xiii.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p xiv.

by imagining the new kind of explorer who would set their sights on the South Pole. Huet has persuasively argued that Verne's polar narratives must be understood as works which engage in a form of hermeneutics, and which investigate the complex relationship "between interpretation and fiction".¹¹⁵ Although clearly informed by actual events and incorporating material taken directly from exploration accounts, *Captain Hatteras* was more than merely Verne's attempt to recast these pivotal moments of polar history into a cohesive fictional narrative. Instead, he adopted the mode of Gothic fiction so that he could present his readers with a disturbing vision of polar exploration as not merely a purposeless enterprise but an irrational one driven by mania and obsession.

If *Captain Hatteras* is a Gothic text which operates by collapsing the boundaries between established knowledge and speculative possibilities, the remainder of this section must be devoted to analyzing how *The Sphinx* also uses the freedoms of fictionality to reinterpret the narrative of polar exploration. As shall now be demonstrated, Verne's novel captures the shift which perceptions of the far south underwent in the period of its composition, as the intriguing question of what might exist at the furthest reaches of the southern hemisphere re-emerged. Although its serialization began in 1864, Verne had specifically set *Captain Hatteras* four years earlier so that his great British explorer could surge ahead of those Americans who were claiming to have made fantastic breakthroughs in the Arctic Regions and seemed about to complete their endeavours by reaching the North Pole. However, when it came to resuming the story of Pym's lost Antarctic expedition, Verne structures time in an even more intricate fashion. *The Sphinx* begins in August 1839, twelve years after the events described in Poe's novel and, crucially, exactly one month before James Clark Ross set sail for the Antarctic Circle to solve what became known as the 'Great Barrier Mystery'.

¹¹⁵ "Winter Lights: Disaster, Interpretation and Jules Verne's Polar Novels," p 161.

In this way, Verne ensures that his search party crosses into entirely unknown territories without any of the vital information Ross brought back to guide them. Indeed, they not only make the same sea voyage as Ross but well ahead of him: they eventually continue their journey on land as Ross himself was prevented from doing, before finally locating the geographical Pole he famously coveted. Therefore, while writing in the late 1890s Verne deprives his characters (and his readers) of the very few definite facts which had been gathered about the Antarctic as a physical territory so that he can remap this space according to his artistic vision. The Gothic technique by which Verne imaginatively merges aspects of genuine accounts of far southern exploration with elements of the unreal polar zone conceived by Poe, creating a “wonderful yet dreadful”¹¹⁶ Antarctic world of his own, shall be closely examined in the next section. For now, it is important to assess how *The Sphinx* represents the new thinking about the South Polar Regions which developed in this era. Neither the worthless, unreachable outland Cook had maintained nor the sublime and tantalizing domain described by Ross, Verne’s novel reinterprets the Antarctic as an ominous realm poised on the verge of further exploration and one which withholds secrets unlike any science has previously attempted to unravel.

The Sphinx ultimately leads the reader into Gothicised regions beyond the South Pole, but like *Arthur Gordon Pym* it begins by situating itself firmly in Cook’s footsteps. The narrator, Joerling, is an American from Connecticut who has been engaged in private research on the Desolation Isles, the archipelago named by Cook in 1776, four years after its official discovery by the French explorer Baron Kerguelen during his search for the legendary *Terra Australis* and fifty years before Pym’s travels also took him there. Staying at Christmas Harbour on the largest of these islands, Joerling has found that his curiosity cannot mitigate the unendurable harshness of life there, or the intense loneliness of this

¹¹⁶ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 5.

dreary place which “no more than a dozen or so vessels”¹¹⁷ pass through in the course of a year.

Even though he is a man of science who has lived for some time on the fringes of the uncharted Antarctic realms, at the outset of *The Sphinx* Joerling feels no temptation to pry into the secrets of these forlorn regions. He considers himself far removed from those men (such as the crew of Wilkes’s newly launched Exploring Expedition) who are determined to locate the South Pole, since he originally considers that “there wouldn’t be much point in it”.¹¹⁸ However, it transpires that the ‘Halbrane’, the first ship which can grant Joerling passage, is bound for the Tristan da Cunha islands, also previously visited by Pym in chapter fifteen of Poe’s novel. On route the ship passes Prince Edward Island, the first landmass Pym observed after his rescue by the ‘Jane Guy’ and whose sighting marked the beginning of his irrevocable descent into the extreme southern latitudes. In this way, Verne informs the reader that Joerling is unknowingly pursuing the very same course he wished to avoid, and is being remorselessly drawn back into the mysteries of the far south.

Joerling may have no desire to join the ranks of those who have resolved to “attain the farthest reaches of the Antarctic seas”,¹¹⁹ but he can still recognise the appeal of the fictional narrative of Pym, one who had already “advanced to such latitudes”.¹²⁰ He is well versed in Poe, and familiar with his “renowned work”¹²¹ about a young adventurer who crossed the Antarctic Circle and found a strange polar world on the other side of a “fantastic sea”.¹²² As much as Joerling appreciates the romanticism and ingenuity of his fellow countryman’s “peculiar novel”,¹²³ in the opening chapters of *The Sphinx* he is incapable of reconciling its seeming fantasy with what he himself has found in the sub-

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p 10.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p 23.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, p 36.

¹²⁰ Ibid, p 45.

¹²¹ Ibid, p 39.

¹²² Ibid, p 45.

¹²³ Ibid, p 50.

Antarctic. Should anyone successfully navigate the ice barrier and find a gateway to an open sea, Joerling still finds it “unreasonable to accept”¹²⁴ the notion that this could allow them to travel all the way to the South Pole.

In other words, at the beginning of *The Sphinx* Joerling firmly upholds the conventional wisdom that the respective furthest southerly points established by Cook and Weddell (71° 15' and 74° 15') amount to a *ne plus ultra*, a natural boundary beyond which nothing of any value or significance existed. However, a subtle transformation occurs as the ‘Halbrane’ moves ever closer to the Antarctic Circle. Left alone with several volumes on far southern exploration and the complete works of Poe, Joerling finds himself giving credence to the bizarre claim of his captain, Len Guy, that *Arthur Gordon Pym* is not a novel at all but a thinly fictionalised account of a genuine polar voyage which led to the disappearance of his brother, William. By reinterpreting the traditional account of Antarctic exploration in light of Poe’s vivid fantasy in this way, the fictitious Joerling enacts Verne’s own method for composing his novel. While he has lived on the edge of this vast unexplored expanse and read Pym’s wondrous account of what lies therein, it is only when Joerling’s knowledge of these regions blurs with Poe’s fantastical Gothic vision (producing an uncanny sense of what Huet terms “geographical displacement”¹²⁵) that the American begins to feel “strangely excited”¹²⁶ by the prospect of venturing further south.

As a writer who had long been fascinated both with Pym’s narrative and the enigmatic polar realms it is consistent that Verne should propose that the endeavours of exploration must not be kept apart from the wild projections of a Gothic imagination: On the contrary, he suggests that by reading these two kinds of text alongside each other the beguiling mystery and immense possibilities of the unfathomed corners of the globe can become manifest. As the following section shall consider, at first these dual renditions of

¹²⁴ Ibid, p 45.

¹²⁵ “*Winter Lights: Disaster, Interpretation and Jules Verne’s Polar Novels*,” p 174.

¹²⁶ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 71.

the Antarctic, the historical and the fictional, appear to be worlds apart. It is only as the novel progresses and Joerling's voyage continues that they begin to overlap, to the point where both modes of interpretation finally offer up a single reality. Consequently, the South Polar Regions emerge as a truly fitting subject for a Gothic fiction, while the Gothic itself proves the ideal literary mode for conveying the strange wonders of the far south.

At the same time Verne reveals the danger in all this, for it is not overriding curiosity or the prospect of glory which now gives rise to Joerling's sudden longing to reach "the wilderness of Antarctica".¹²⁷ Instead, he becomes "haunted"¹²⁸ by an "odd restlessness"¹²⁹ which "gave me no peace".¹³⁰ Only too late does he realize that he is now inextricably "caught up in a chain of events"¹³¹ which is "dragging me towards the unknown... that unknown whose mysteries so many fearless pioneers had tried in vain to solve!"¹³² His thoughts are now enslaved to the same monomaniacal obsession which caused Pym and Hatteras to gravitate towards the Polar Regions, and he has unwittingly become consumed by a maddening impulse to decipher the great riddle of the extreme south.

Verne's awareness of what the Antarctic regions had come to represent as the nineteenth century unfolded can best be ascertained from the eighth chapter of *The Sphinx*. In the same manner that Poe used chapter 16 of *Arthur Gordon Pym* to summarize "the progress of discovery"¹³³ in the Antarctic up until 1828 (paying particular attention to the "attempts at reaching the southern pole"¹³⁴ which had been made prior to Pym's own), Verne devotes chapter eight of his novel to supplementing Poe's historical account with a more complete one leading up to the departure of the Exploring Expedition in 1839.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid, p 86.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, p 1125.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

However, Verne includes this not merely to create the semblance of continuity between these actual voyages and that of his imaginary explorers but to outline the ways in which science itself had revised its position on the far south in the intervening years.

In his account Verne mentions the Royal Navy expedition led by Commander Henry Foster and the scientist E.N. Kendall, which left England at “the very same time”¹³⁵ that Pym was heading below the Antarctic Circle. Charged with surveying the South Shetlands and other Antarctic island groups in 1828, Verne states that while Pym was discovering unknown polar lands and a lost race this expedition did not even consider it necessary to proceed “beyond latitude 64° 45' south”,¹³⁶ since James Weddell had maintained that there was nothing but ocean beyond the latitude of 74° 15' which he reached in 1822. As Verne notes, it was the testimonies of unofficial explorers like the British whaling captains John Briscoe and John Balleny which cast doubt on Weddell’s supposition. These sailors, who were the first to ‘follow’ Pym’s path by attempting to penetrate this labyrinth of pack ice and enter into the extreme southern latitudes, had made it almost as far as Cook had done. Furthermore, Verne writes that both brought back “clear evidence that hinted at the existence of an Antarctic landmass”¹³⁷ at the heart of the polar ocean. Their claims eventually overturned Weddell’s conclusion that there was no Antarctic continent, and they stimulated a renewed curiosity about the South Polar Regions.

In other words, while *Arthur Gordon Pym* directly challenged Cook’s earlier assertion that any lands at the extreme south constituted a dismal void of no interest to science Verne sets *The Sphinx* at a later point in time when Weddell’s dominant view of the Antarctic had been replaced with profound uncertainty and endless possibility. The ‘Halbrane’ plunges into regions which have inspired such remarkably different accounts

¹³⁵ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 70.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

that there is no telling what kinds of territories may be found. All interpretations of the Antarctic's white space are once again feasible: as Joerling states, the voyagers may confirm the existence of the speculative "passageway to the pole"¹³⁸ running through the Great Ice Barrier and leading all the way to the earth's axis, or they may be forced to leave their vessel and set out for the Pole by crossing "that huge landmass whose centre point it could well be".¹³⁹ In this way, Verne makes it known that previous explorers have only put together the first handful of pieces of the Antarctic puzzle, and that hidden away at the base of the globe is an entire world with "5,000,000 square miles left to discover".¹⁴⁰

To conclude this section, in the early chapters of *The Sphinx* Verne establishes the Antarctic as a field of mutable perceptions; this concept of the far south as a great space whose ambiguities mean that it is open to mapping and limitless remapping, to interpretation and unlimited reinterpretation, is one which he develops as the novel unfolds. In setting out to tell the story of a voyage whose goal, in Huet's words, "is to retrace that of Pym",¹⁴¹ Verne goes far beyond this basic premise and rewrites much of the history of far southern exploration. As the next section shall consider, even after Joerling has completed his fantastic journey and discovered what has become of Poe's narrator he remains unsure exactly where he has been and what regions he has traversed.

In *The Sphinx* the attempt to take Antarctic exploration to its logical conclusion only produces another Gothic narrative as strange and perplexing as Pym's. Instead of depicting this expedition to the inner sections of the Antarctic continent as the last glorious adventure of geographical discovery, Verne once again takes the elements of a romantic quest and recasts them into a narrative of hallucinatory terror. If he had reduced the pursuit of the North Pole to a demented search for the eternally unfindable and a harrowing

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid, p 68.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ "Winter Lights: Disaster, Interpretation and Jules Verne's Polar Novels," p 175.

catalogue of human suffering in *Captain Hatteras*, then it followed that Verne should depict a voyage to the mysterious and notoriously inaccessible realms of the far south as a nightmarish disaster of even greater proportions.

Section 4: “...Into the Realm of Things Impossible...”:¹⁴² Verne, Poe, the Nature of Antarctic Terror, and the Unfinished Story of *Arthur Gordon Pym*

The unusual relationship between *The Sphinx of the Ice Realms* and its more illustrious source text has resulted in the fact that Verne’s second polar novel has rarely received much critical acclaim. When the two works have been assessed together, the praise lavished on *Arthur Gordon Pym* has almost invariably come at the expense of any afforded to Verne’s Antarctic Gothic tale. Some writers have been particularly harsh in their judgements: David Standish has described *The Sphinx* as offering “a lame ‘ending’ completely lacking in the grand spiritual mystery Poe’s final paragraphs suggest”,¹⁴³ while Francis Spufford has observed that Verne’s literary idol “would not have been flattered by this assault on his deliberate indistinctness”.¹⁴⁴ Stephen J. Pyne has also argued that there is little either new or profound in this late Verne work, concluding that it is “really nothing more than an obiter dictum on Poe”,¹⁴⁵ significant only for the ways in which it demonstrates “the continuing effect that Poe had on imaginative literature about Antarctica”.¹⁴⁶

The first detailed critical assessment of the connection between *Arthur Gordon Pym* and *The Sphinx*, a section of Jules Zanger’s 1986 essay ‘Poe’s Endless Voyage’, often seems more like a general description of the ways in which Verne’s work is artistically inferior to Poe’s. Having asserted that the brilliance of *Arthur Gordon Pym*’s Antarctic Gothic technique lies in its mystifying “lack of closure”,¹⁴⁷ and its refusal to adhere to any traditional formulation of Gothic literature, Zanger holds that Verne’s novel never begins to approach the same level of sophistication. While conceding that the book is

¹⁴² *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 384.

¹⁴³ *Hollow Earth*, p 113.

¹⁴⁴ *I May Be Some Time*, p 75.

¹⁴⁵ Stephen J. Pyne, *The Ice* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003), p 166.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Jules Zanger, ‘Poe’s Endless Voyage’: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, *Papers on Language and Literature*, Summer 86, Vol. 22, p 277.

“occasionally ingenious”¹⁴⁸ in the way it strives to credibly resolve Pym’s narrative, Zanger writes that it is precisely due to the fact that Verne “firmly commits himself to a naturalistic solution of Poe’s enigma”¹⁴⁹ which makes *The Sphinx* a “finally unimaginative”¹⁵⁰ work in comparison with the text which inspired it.

Rather than trying to match Poe’s grandiose Gothic vision, Zanger argues that all of Verne’s efforts are devoted to trying to dispel the ever-deepening uncertainty which for him is absolutely central to *Arthur Gordon Pym*’s form and aesthetic. Whereas Pym’s narrative dazzlingly experiments with the artistic potential of ambiguity itself, he writes that *The Sphinx* is a text in which “precisely the opposite occurs”,¹⁵¹ as Verne systematically “domesticates and reduces the unknown to the commonplace and the mechanical”.¹⁵² Instead of skilfully using the theme of a polar voyage to explore the limits of fact and fiction, Zanger posits that Verne’s continuation only succeeds in “blocking each of the avenues of wonder that Poe’s narration provided”.¹⁵³ For these reasons, he declares that *The Sphinx* is a misguided work which must “in every significant way”¹⁵⁴ be regarded “as a diminution rather than addition”¹⁵⁵ to Poe’s original story.

To a greater extent than any other critical analysis, Zanger’s interpretation of *The Sphinx* has determined how the book has subsequently been read. In her study of Antarctic fiction from 2012 Elizabeth Leane all but reiterates Zanger’s position, classifying Verne’s tale as an essentially “reductive”¹⁵⁶ response to Poe. Shunning the fantastic creative possibilities of the yet unsighted Antarctic realms, Leane writes that in Verne’s work “polar mythology and Pym’s mysterious fate become here material phenomena readily

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, p 279.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p 280.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Leane, *Antarctica in Fiction: Imaginative Narratives of the Far South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p 64.

describable by science”.¹⁵⁷ On the basis of these arguments two conclusions can be inferred. Firstly, according to this predominant reading of *The Sphinx* the novel is primarily understood as Verne’s direct response to Poe as a writer rather than an example of Antarctic Gothic fiction in its own right. Secondly, this reading also contends that Verne’s novel constitutes his attempt to provide a “scientific explanation”¹⁵⁸ for the more wondrous Antarctic phenomena encountered by Pym, and that Verne’s main motivation for writing his continuation was that this would allow him to replace what he perceived as the unacceptable Gothic excesses of Poe’s tale with his own variety of what Victoria Nelson terms “techno-scientific materialism”.¹⁵⁹

Overall, this reading asserts that, despite his reverence for its author, Verne regarded the ending of *Arthur Gordon Pym* as an anticlimactic artistic blunder and an admission of imaginative defeat. In an era of accelerating polar discovery, it is supposed that Verne sought to reclaim the Antarctic from the fanciful ideas it had once inspired. In this sense, this reading concurs with the traditional view that Verne’s novels represent the true advent of science fiction, that it was his work which saw it develop into a genre which, in the words of Roger Luckhurst, “deploys the scientific method”¹⁶⁰ and is “part of the scientific enlightenment”.¹⁶¹ According to this account, by producing more scientifically rigorous fiction of this kind Verne displaced the pseudoscientific fantasies of what were then retrospectively interpreted as the “degraded forms”¹⁶² of literature which preceded it, primarily the Gothic hybrid originated by Poe.

To consider the first of the points outlined above, the previous section has established that Verne’s interest in the Polar Regions as enthralling settings for tales of

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ ‘Poe’s Endless Voyage’, p 280.

¹⁵⁹ Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001) p 152.

¹⁶⁰ Roger Luckhurst, ‘Pseudoscience’ in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherry Vint ed. *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), p 403.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

adventure not only pre-dated his exposure to Poe but reflected his abiding fascination with exploration's efforts to bring those frozen domains within the bounds of empirical science. Since his colossal literary project, the *Voyages extraordinaires*, eventually encompassed almost every country on the globe, it seems extremely unlikely that the earth's last unmapped continent would not have become the main subject of one of Verne's fictions, even if Poe had never based a work on this theme. Indeed, as Brian Taves has noted, Verne's curiosity about the Poles which first focused itself on the Arctic had started "shifting to the South Pole"¹⁶³ at an earlier stage in his career, and by the 1890s "the Antarctic had been the locale for other Vernian incidents",¹⁶⁴ figuring fleetingly in such novels as *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869) and *Robur the Conqueror*, or *The Clipper of the Clouds* (1886). In other words, although the far south of *Arthur Gordon Pym* shall once more be shown to have played a role in shaping Verne's representations of polar exploration in *The Sphinx*, it is an insupportable assumption that he only wrote a novel about the Antarctic because Poe had already done so.

Turning to the second point put forward in this reading, that Verne envisaged *The Sphinx* as a kind of rationalistic corrective to *Arthur Gordon Pym*, this position can only be sustained if Verne did indeed perceive the novel's finale as an example of clumsy supernaturalism. However, Verne's own thoughts on the subject provide little justification for this interpretation. In a letter to his publisher Pierre-Jules Hetzel in September 1896, Verne declared that among the reasons he felt enthusiastic about his continuation of *Arthur Gordon Pym* was the excitement he had experienced in using "everything Poe left in suspense".¹⁶⁵ He wrote that he was "taken with the extraordinary side"¹⁶⁶ of the novel he was composing according to this strategy, and felt that a work of this kind would capture

¹⁶³ Brian Taves Introduction to Brian Taves ed. *An Antarctic Mystery, or, The Sphinx of the Ice Fields* by Jules Verne (Milton Keynes: Wildside Press, 2005), p 6.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Reproduced in Frederick Walter Paul ed., *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm* by Jules Verne, p xiv.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

the interest of a public which was once again “talking about voyages and discoveries at the South Pole”.¹⁶⁷ In this sense, like Poe before him, Verne appears to have primarily responded to the unrivalled creative opportunity the Antarctic presented, the freedom to construct a geographical realm whose unseen regions were stranger than anywhere previously fathomed by science.

As for Poe’s alleged supernaturalism, In ‘Edgar Poe et ses Oeuvres’ (written 33 years before *The Sphinx*) Verne evaluates the particular mode of the Gothic the American author employed and discusses what bearing this has on the verisimilitude of his fictions. He notes that for all the uncanny splendour which leads the reader to “marvel at his works”,¹⁶⁸ Poe remains a writer who “insists on explaining everything by physical laws, which, if needs be, he makes up”.¹⁶⁹ Far from indulging in absurd preternatural effects which required no greater explanation, Verne argues that Poe “creates fantastic things *in cold blood*”.¹⁷⁰ By this he means that even the most implausible features of his works are part of a carefully constructed projection, one which has the semblance of some basis in actual scientific reality. This leads Verne to observe that, in comparison with other Gothic writers, Poe is undeniably “an apostle of materialism”.¹⁷¹

Verne’s acknowledgement that Poe’s Gothicism always obeys the rules of his materialistic fictional universe clearly renders untenable the argument that he wrote *The Sphinx* in order to dispel what he mistakenly interpreted as its ‘supernatural’ elements. It also overturns the view and that, as a work of fiction, Verne’s own Antarctic novel can be judged an artistic failure as a direct result of his supposed misperception. What Zanger overlooks is the fact that Verne himself was a Gothic writer. As Daniel Couégnas holds, following Poe, Verne developed a mode of fiction which can be termed “a ‘renewed’

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Reproduced in Frederick Walter Paul ed., *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm* by Jules Verne, p 384.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

Gothic”, which made use of the devices of Gothic fiction in order to investigate new ideas, skilfully fabricating narratives in which “science is a source of wonder”.¹⁷² From Poe, Verne learned that a Gothicised fictional world could contain anything no matter how strange or fantastic, provided it was depicted in a plausible manner. As Couégnas writes, “[P]laying the game Todorov calls ‘fantastic uncanny’, Verne does not deny himself, before the final rational explanation, the most fanciful deviations, disturbing facts, peculiar legends, which create an atmosphere that conditions the reader, anguishing or delighting him”.¹⁷³

Since neither of the arguments posited by the predominant reading of *The Sphinx* are borne out by Verne’s own views or by the work itself, it is therefore necessary to present another interpretation of the novel which does not rest upon the idea that it was fabricated simply to redeem Poe’s textual aberration or to win back the imaginative territory of the Antarctic from his uncontrolled extravagances. This reading, which shall take up the rest of this section and the next one, must answer three central questions: what is the Antarctic Gothic technique which Verne adopts in his novel, how does it correspond with and diverge from the one formulated by Poe, and where does *The Sphinx* lie in relation to the discursive shift which heralded the arrival of a new age of far southern exploration?

Sixty years before Verne began work on his sequel, Poe had tested his powers of imagination in trying to describe the kinds of extraordinary sights and intriguing phenomena which might await discovery in the South Polar Regions. Projected in advance of the findings of Wilkes and Ross, the illusory Antarctic realms of *Arthur Gordon Pym* had reflected the doubtful and inconsistent account of them which exploration had obtained

¹⁷² Daniel Couégnas, ‘*Traces Intertextuelles: Le “Gothique” de Jules Verne*’ in François Raymond ed., *Jules Verne: 5* (Paris: Minard, 1987), p 41. “un gothique rénové”.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p 40. “Jouant donc le jeu de ce que Todorov appelle ‘fantastique-étrange’, Verne ne s’interdit nullement, avant l’explication rationnelle finale, les détours les plus fantaisistes du côté des faits inquiétants, des legends bizarre qui créent l’atmosphère, mettent le lecteur en condition, l’angoissent ou l’enchantent”.

by that time. In this regard, the late nineteenth-century revolution in far southern discovery had major implications for the creation of a new work of fiction about the Antarctic. Whatever path to these regions Verne chose for his explorers, they could not take the exact same one as Pym since science had confirmed that the last phase of his sea route to the Pole was physically impossible. The final chapter of Poe's novel had taken place in a "wide and desolate Antarctic Ocean, in a latitude exceeding eighty-four degrees",¹⁷⁴ but as a result of the efforts of Carsten Borchgrevink it was now known that this degree of latitude lay within the Antarctic landmass itself.

Consequently, it must have been apparent to Verne that this recent increase in geographic knowledge meant that producing a continuation of Poe's tale would necessarily entail re-writing it to some extent. However, this may well have been part of his intention from the outset. Timothy Unwin is one of several critics who have proposed that along with his scheme to use the *Voyages extraordinaires* to "colonise the whole of reality in the written word, to cover not just the globe, but creation in its entirety, with words that rein it in and make sense of it",¹⁷⁵ Verne had another notion of what he was accomplishing. Unwin suggests that Verne saw his novels as working models of the concept that creating fiction always entails "the constant retelling and reworking of prior narratives".¹⁷⁶ Just as actual explorers had to make their way across regions previously charted in order to reach new horizons, for Verne producing a work of fiction inevitably involved "a journey back over familiar textual terrains"¹⁷⁷ which itself becomes "an itinerary through to a new place".¹⁷⁸ According to Unwin, Verne believed that it was only by re-exploring geographical spaces which had already inscribed and then allowing itself to be re-written

¹⁷⁴ *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, p 1175.

¹⁷⁵ Timothy Unwin, *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p 26.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p 212.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p 213.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p 218.

that a work of fiction could provide what he describes as “the route to discovery of the unknown”.¹⁷⁹

Given the fact that *Arthur Gordon Pym* already constituted an ‘unending’ text positively inviting further elaboration, it becomes even clearer why it held such lasting appeal for Verne. David Meakin has written that in terms of Verne’s intertextual scheme what Poe’s Antarctic fiction represented was “a palimpsest, a field of new writing”¹⁸⁰ which, much like the South Polar Regions themselves, demanded greater investigation. Meakin finds abundant support for his view in the innumerable correspondences between the two novels, most obviously the fact that “[g]eographical details, histories and past explorations, are repeated from one text to the other at identical junctures in the voyage”.¹⁸¹ At the same time, Meakin also falls into the error of concluding that Verne intricately incorporates all this material from Poe’s Gothic text simply so that he could then erase a conclusion which “eludes logical explanation”¹⁸² and replace it with one in a “more positivistic mode”,¹⁸³ and closer to the view of literature as a form of science which he sees as underlying Verne’s entire literary project.

If things are not so simple, and Verne’s continuation is more than just a means for allowing him to inscribe “his own ‘rational’ conclusion”¹⁸⁴ over the “mysterious blankness”¹⁸⁵ which Meakin considers both the theme and the overriding symbol of the closing, polar-based chapters of *Arthur Gordon Pym*, then what was his true objective in rewriting the novel in this fashion? While Verne undoubtedly recognised that the South Polar Regions were considerably better understood than they had been only a short time before, the ambiguity which continued to envelop them meant that they were still far from

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p 212.

¹⁸⁰ David Meakin, ‘*Like Poles Attracting*: Intertextual Magnetism in Poe, Verne, and Gracq’, *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (July 1993), p 604.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid, p 601.

¹⁸³ Ibid, p 602.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p 603.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p 602.

exhausted as a space for imaginative exploration. So long as it remained largely uncharted, the far south constituted a breach in human knowledge which gave rise to theoretical ideas which were often in every way as fantastic as fictional visions.

It is this gradually narrowing gulf between the known and the unknown which both frames the imaginative terrain of *The Sphinx* and dictates Verne's Gothic technique. Writing in the 1830s, Poe had enjoyed virtually unlimited creative freedom in regard to the Antarctic but he still realised that the effectiveness of his otherworldly imaginings was contingent upon their degree of verisimilitude, given the increasingly scientific character of the discourse concerning the South Polar Regions. Sixty years later, Verne was faced with a more defined but still disconcertingly vague expanse in which to set his own polar romance. Exploration was gradually developing a unified image of what Antarctica was, but so long as a curtain of primal darkness obscured its central territories the ice-bound continent would retain its power as a site of mystery. However, as ever more of these territories came into scientific focus verisimilitude naturally assumed an even greater importance: if more than just a semblance of a scientific basis was required, what kind of far south could literature now represent?

Verne was not the only writer of this period to contend with this dilemma. Although it was only published posthumously in 1888, James De Mille¹⁸⁶ had been

¹⁸⁶ In addition to being Professor of History and Rhetoric at Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia, the Canadian academic James De Mille (1833-1880) was also the author of thirty works of fiction encompassing many genres, including adventure stories for boys, sensational mystery tales, historical narratives and comic romances. After its anonymous serialisation in *Harper's Weekly* magazine, *A Strange Manuscript* appeared in book form, and drew criticism from reviewers on account of its close resemblance to such bestselling 'lost race' and 'lost world' narratives as *The Coming Race* (1871) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873) and *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and *She: A History of Adventure* (1887) by H. Rider Haggard (1856-1925). Recent scholarship has revealed that De Mille composed his work well before these novels were published. Furthermore, the extent of the influence of *Arthur Gordon Pym* and 'MS. Found in a Bottle' on *A Strange Manuscript* has also been examined. As a self-reflexive text which incorporates current scientific data and contemporary colonial discourse and features an imaginary Antarctic realm, a shipwrecked explorer, an invented language and an indeterminate ending, Poe's novel and tale are now considered to have been central inspirations for DeMille's own innovative speculative fiction. See Daniel Burgoyne, introduction to *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* by James De Mille (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2011), and W.H. New ed. 'De Mille's Utopian Fantasy,' Special Issue, *Canadian Literature* 145, summer 1995 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995)

working on his novel *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* for at least twenty years before this. Although not a continuation of a Poe tale, with its plot about an intrepid mariner who is embroiled in a mutiny aboard a whaling ship and then washed ashore on a semi-tropical island at the South Pole, home to a primitive race who crave darkness and shun light, there can be little doubt that the fantasy and high adventure of De Mille's Antarctic novel owe a substantial debt to *Arthur Gordon Pym* and 'MS. Found in a Bottle'. Two years after Verne published *The Sphinx*, another direct sequel to *Arthur Gordon Pym* appeared. Written by the physician and Poe enthusiast Charles Romyn Dake,¹⁸⁷ *A Strange Discovery* (1899) sees Pym and Dirk Peters reach an area near the South Pole kept warm by volcanic activity and become the first explorers since Sir Francis Drake to locate a great city of white marble at latitude 89° south.

De Mille and Romyn Dake's novels attest to two things. Firstly, they provide clear evidence of the fact that towards the end of the nineteenth century the Antarctic had, by necessity, become the obvious setting for imaginary voyage tales. The enormous quantities of travel literature published in the previous decades meant that readers were now in a position to familiarise themselves with the most remote features of distant geographies, but the far south remained one of the notable exceptions. Since most of it awaited exploration, the shadowy zone at the centre of the Antarctic could still function as a place where lost civilizations and prehistoric creatures might feasibly be found in such literary fantasies. Secondly, *A Strange Manuscript* and *A Strange Discovery* are both pseudo-scientific

¹⁸⁷ Little is known about Charles Romyn Dake, sometimes spelt Charles Romeyn Dake (1849-1899). A native of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, he graduated from Columbia University in 1873 and established himself as a practitioner of homeopathic medicine. His interest in literature led him to become the editor of the *Homeopathic News*, and it was in this journal that his only other works of fiction, 'The Limits of the Imagination' (1892) and 'The Death and Resurrection of Gerald Deane' (1893), short stories which also attest to his fascination with Poe, were published. As a work of fiction, *A Strange Discovery* exploits the playful, hoaxing element inherent in *Arthur Gordon Pym* but in a more overt manner. Before embarking on his own continuation of Pym's adventures, the wide-ranging and often satirical first half of Dake's novel concerns itself with such subjects as the character traits peculiar to Americans, the U.S political system, the nature of religious belief and medical science, as well as a lengthy disquisition on the prose, poetry and reputation of Poe.

travelogues of the kind Poe had pioneered in *Arthur Gordon Pym*, showing that the potential of this form of fictional narrative remained the same in the 1890s as it was back in 1838. However, while the polar journeys depicted in these works maintain plausibility up to a point they (in the manner of *Symzonia*) begin to draw attention to their own artifice, and ultimately reveal themselves as convoluted satirical yarns being spun for amusement.

In contrast to these authors, Verne approaches his Antarctic novel in a much more solemn and skilful fashion, and refuses to allow the reader to interpret its story as a conscious fabrication of this kind. If Poe created a supremely uncanny effect by describing the ethereal phenomena of his polar world using the precise terminology of a scientific account, the technique with which Verne advances the Antarctic Gothic genre exploits the tension between the perceived fictiveness of Pym's narrative and the expanding knowledge of the actual far south to create an overwhelming sense of defamiliarization. Never fully conforming either to the concept of the Antarctic which was then being formulated by the steady progress of exploration or to the fantastical polar realms described by Pym, the "fearful regions"¹⁸⁸ of *The Sphinx* are a place of false trails and treacherous similarities, an impasse in the project of human discovery threatening destruction for those unwise enough to venture there.

¹⁸⁸ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 83.

Section 5: “This is How it Ends...or Rather Doesn’t End”:¹⁸⁹
Re-Writing and Re-Mapping the Gothic Antarctic and Verne’s Nightmare of Endless
Reinterpretation

Analyzing Verne’s gothicisation of polar discourse in *The Sphinx* and examining the ways in which the novel and exploration history intersect is made difficult by the fact that it does not concern itself with exploration in the true sense. Unlike Captain Hatteras and his unstoppable quest to be the first to reach the North Pole, none of the characters in *The Sphinx* sets out with any real intention of exploring it. Len Guy wishes to find his lost brother, Dirk Peters hopes to rescue his old friend, and Joerling is originally only interested in obtaining part of his passage back to civilization before being drawn into these mysteries. Therefore, the primary motivation of each of these characters is, like that of Verne himself, the desire to put an end to a prior narrative which is in some sense unfinished: In the case of the Captain that of the missing ‘Jane Guy’, the unknown fate of Pym in the instance of Peters, and for Joerling confirmation that the Antarctic is nothing more than the bleak wasteland science has led him to believe.

In other words, the voyage of the ‘Halbrane’ is not meant to be one of discovery but of resolution, the tying up of the loose threads of history. Joerling acknowledges that “so many mariners would have jumped at the chance to settle the geographic challenge of the Antarctic pole”.¹⁹⁰ Nonetheless, in chapter seventeen he observes “none of us thought about the South Pole”¹⁹¹ for “its conquest wasn’t the reason our ‘Halbrane’ had been facing the Antarctic Ocean’s dangers”.¹⁹² Indeed, when the survivors directly cross the point of the earth’s axis nine chapters later Joerling only mentions it briefly, even though in chronological terms they are the first characters in all of Verne’s fiction to reach it.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, p 50.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p 140.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p 141.

¹⁹² Ibid.

However, as in so many works of Gothic fiction the quest to resolve the unexplained aspects of the past in *The Sphinx* becomes fraught with difficulty, owing to its tendency to disrupt the surface order of the present.

In the first eleven chapters of the book, Joerling records his impressions of a series of subantarctic islands, and these correlate perfectly with what he has been led to expect from the works of exploration literature lent to him by Len Guy. Verne's densely detailed descriptions of such remote sites as the Falkland Islands, the South Sandwich Islands, and the South Orkney Islands take up a substantial part of the first third of the novel. He furnishes the reader with a prodigious quantity of information relating to their geographical positions, geological composition, and the histories of their discovery and colonisation. In this respect, Verne appears to put forward a seemingly incontrovertible notion of the process of exploration as the ceaseless unfolding of one enormous text. As these books attest, these islands have been assimilated into the collective of human knowledge and it seems unquestionable that any lands further south will be similarly converted.

This apparently relentless movement is halted by a grim discovery. When Len Guy sights a frozen corpse lying upon a piece of drift ice he identifies it as that of Patterson, one of the crew of his lost brother's ship. However, it is not Patterson's body which proves the important find, so much as his diary. The "almost completely obliterated"¹⁹³ words of the last page of this Gothic document are enough to temporarily arrest this process of inscription. Not only does the dramatic interpolation of this text imply that Antarctic exploration may lead somewhere vastly different to the traditional featureless, uninhabitable void Joerling has presumed (to the supposedly imaginary island of Tsalal and the fantastical polar realms of Poe's novel no less), but it also suggests that even the published version of Pym's narrative also fails to provide the entire story. If William Guy

¹⁹³ Ibid, p 57.

was an authentic person and he and a number of his crew have survived somewhere, then the true nature of the South Pole is once again fully open to speculation.

The only way to determine if Patterson's written words are closer to the facts than Pym's published testament, or if there is any truth in either of them, is for Len Guy to make his way into the Antarctic and uncover what lies hidden there. In this way, the novel itself mirrors Verne's own Gothic technique. Faced with the dual task of completing Poe's 'unfinished' text and also bringing to life the as yet unexplored spaces of the Antarctic continent, Verne accomplishes both by pursuing an imaginative trajectory of his own which subtly abolishes the distinction between fact and fiction as Poe's had done. Once the 'Halbrane' has left behind the outer latitudes reached by Cook, Balleny and Weddell, it is Pym's account which then performs the function of a map (or as Joerling puts it, "the most reliable guide available to us"¹⁹⁴) which the travellers must follow in order to reach the centre of this great white fastness. In this way, instead of purposely seeking to obliterate the polar wonders of *Arthur Gordon Pym*, in *The Sphinx* Verne demonstrates what Herbert Lottman terms "the essential soundness of Poe's narrative",¹⁹⁵ while at the same time entirely reconfiguring its features in his imagination, as this chapter shall examine shortly.

About to enter those unfamiliar latitudes where only the 'Jane Guy' is alleged to have gone before, Joerling's mission to verify Pym and Patterson's accounts is hindered by the ever-more astonishing nature of what he experiences there. He observes that the "continual daylight",¹⁹⁶ the "glimmers from polar auroras",¹⁹⁷ and the other phenomena of these "daunting lands"¹⁹⁸ are so unearthly that "a person with a highly imaginative mind would surely experience the weirdest overexcitement",¹⁹⁹ and fall victim to "visions,

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, p 118.

¹⁹⁵ Herbert R. Lottman, *Jules Verne: An Exploratory Biography* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), p 301.

¹⁹⁶ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 101.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

nightmares, [and] a sleepwalker's hallucinations".²⁰⁰ Although he claims he is not susceptible to delusions of this kind, Joerling admits that the "feeling of anguish and horror"²⁰¹ generated by the polar depths are beginning to breed "obsessive fears"²⁰² in his mind. These Gothic realms (a glimpse of how "our planet used to be back in the ice age"²⁰³) engender a strangeness of vision which is sufficient for him to believe that he might be travelling through a "world of the uncanny"²⁰⁴ or upon a "cosmic stage".²⁰⁵ In other words, as his voyage continues Joerling grows less preoccupied with affirming or denying previous accounts and more consumed with the challenge of faithfully recording his own vision of the Antarctic.

If *The Sphinx* constitutes Verne's re-writing of *Arthur Gordon Pym*, his imaginative remapping of the Antarctic [**Fig. 30**] is undoubtedly informed by his awareness that, along with its potential to deceive the senses, the defamiliarizing power of the far south derived from the fact that the very geography of these regions was highly mutable, a bewildering state of affairs described by all those who had travelled there. One of the main reasons why Antarctica eluded the grasp of science for so long, and gave rise to such a confusing range of exploration accounts, was that its spatial boundaries are radically inconsistent. Depending on the time of year they set out for it, voyagers to the extreme south are liable to reach extremely different destinations. Bill Manhire has written that the actual continent of Antarctica "doubles its size in winter",²⁰⁶ making it the only one on earth with naturally "mobile borders".²⁰⁷ Therefore, as Elizabeth Leane has argued, the fact

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p 184.

²⁰² Ibid, p 121.

²⁰³ Ibid, p 101.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Bill Manhire, *The Wide White Page: Writers Imagine Antarctica* (Victoria: Victoria University Press, 2004), p 10.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

that the far south really is “an undefinable, seemingly limitless place”²⁰⁸ which has “no fixed shape”²⁰⁹ is one of its chief qualifications as a setting for works of Gothic literature.

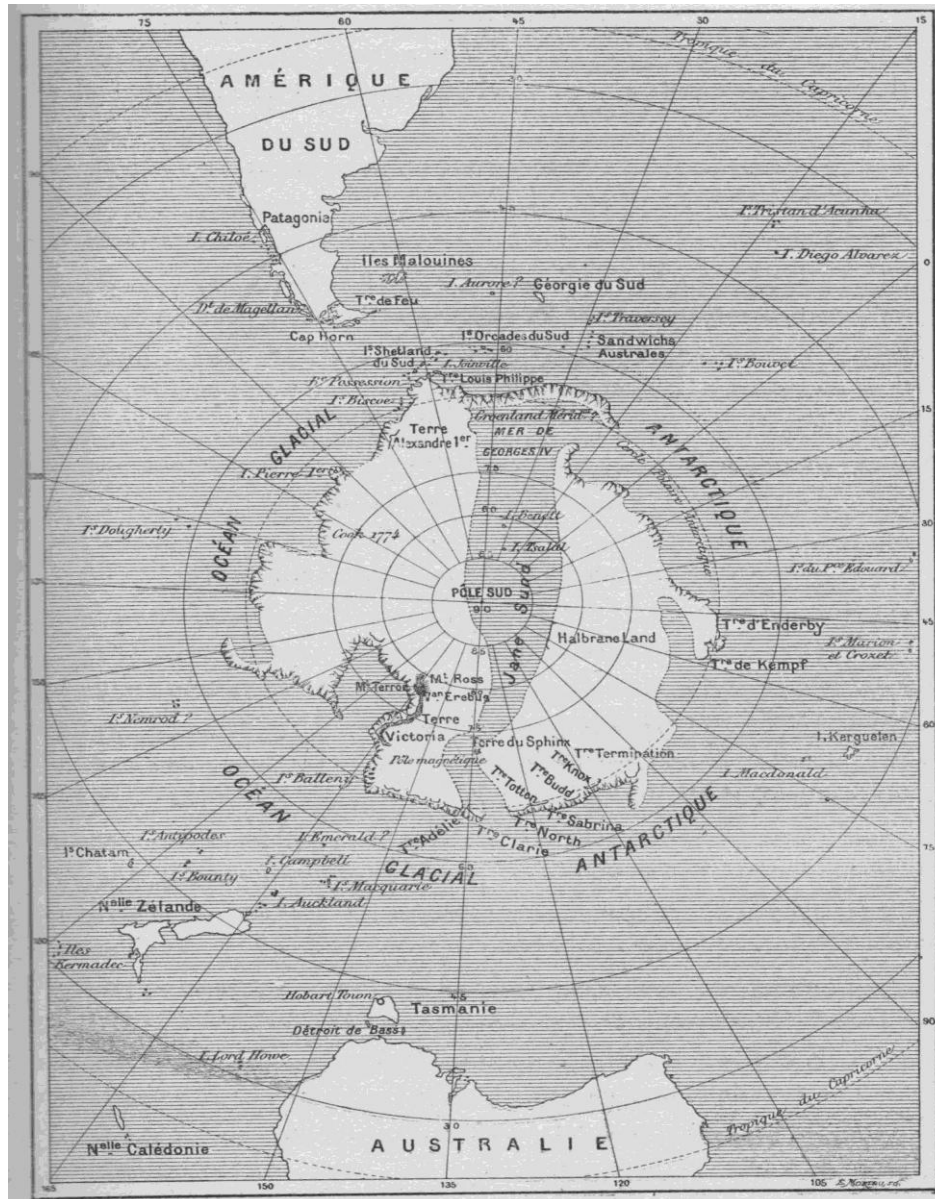


Fig. 30: Verne’s imaginary map of the South Polar Regions from *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*

Noting the puzzling relativity which characterises different explorer’s encounters with the Antarctic, Joerling concludes that what has allowed the ‘Halbrane’ to enter this

²⁰⁸ *Antarctica in Fiction*, p 78.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p 79.

remarkably “navigable”²¹⁰ sea previously reached only by Pym is an exceptionally advantageous set of factors. Whereas even the ‘Jane Guy’ battled through storms and only located a passage through the dreaded ice barrier at the last moment when it entered the Antarctic Ocean at the beginning of January, the ‘Halbrane’ has discovered that the conditions there only a short time earlier in mid-December (favourable winds and warm temperatures) are vastly different. However, even though this is what the ‘Halbrane’ has found, Joerling remains very reluctant to conclude that they must always prevail at this time of year. While Len Guy suggests that they will return home with “a body of information on this sector of the southern seas”²¹¹ which shall be a valuable guide for future generations of mariners, Joerling speculates that the combination of conditions their ship has encountered may prove to be so “unusual”²¹² it may only “materialize once in twenty years...[or] in fifty years”²¹³ if ever again. Again, Verne is representing the far south as a defamiliarizing space which eludes final analysis and a text perpetually open to re-interpretation.

When the ‘Halbrane’ reaches latitude 83° 20' Tsalal is located just as Pym’s account has promised, Len Guy eagerly hopes to find evidence of his brother. Although the island is black in every aspect, there is nothing else about it which confirms that it is the same place which Poe’s hero claimed to have explored. Indeed, the “fearsome boneyard”²¹⁴ the ‘Halbrane’’s crew have found so little resembles the “fabulous land”²¹⁵ of Pym’s narrative that the captain orders his men to check the ship’s position. There are no visible signs of the Tsalalians or their village, and to Joerling the ubiquitous blackness of their surroundings this time seems to be the product of volcanic ash which has been “spewed out

²¹⁰ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 119.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, p 180.

²¹² *Ibid*.

²¹³ *Ibid*.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 135.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, p 134.

of the earth's innards",²¹⁶ verifying his suspicion that "some frightful, invincible cataclysm had overwhelmed the entire surface of the region".²¹⁷ Since this entire polar island has changed beyond all recognition, Guy decides to risk being caught in "the dreaded cold season"²¹⁸ so that he can "look for the 'Jane's' castaways in another part of the Antarctic Ocean".²¹⁹

Confirming the idea first put forward by Cook that large bodies of ice could only originate on land, Joerling predicts that the volatility of the great frozen shelf surrounding the polar coast will make a landing extremely perilous. However, he is unaware of the other factors which will make this undertaking infinitely more hazardous and ensure that the 'Halbrane' never even reaches the far southern shore. Displaying his familiarity with the more fantastic aspects of polar science, Verne once more uses the Antarctic's capacity to confound the senses to create scope for Gothic terror. In chapter twenty-two, the crew of the 'Halbrane' observe indistinct shapes "taking form to starboard, standing out hazily against the line between sky and sea",²²⁰ and assume the vessel is at last on course for its "ultimate destination".²²¹ Believing that they will shortly locate a safe harbour on this mysterious shoreline, Joerling and the others try to help the ship steer towards it. Striving to keep sight of these evanescent lands, they then find themselves unable to track these "hazy silhouettes".²²² Even though the Antarctic summer provides continual light and what appeared on the horizon looked overwhelmingly like a coastline, Joerling has the frightful realisation that there is no way to be sure that "land lay in front of our eyes".²²³

Convinced that the Antarctic mainland has been identified, Len Guy insists they push on. Meanwhile, Joerling is overcome by his recognition of the dreadful arbitrariness

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid, p 139.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid, p 178.

²²¹ Ibid, p 179.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid, p 178.

which constantly undermines human perceptions in this white world. He notes that “[I]n any other region, captains can promptly issue orders to anchor offshore and not get branded as reckless”,²²⁴ but here, in the extreme south, “how cautious we had to be!”²²⁵ Fighting to maintain their view of this “barely glimpsed coast”,²²⁶ even though “there wasn’t a single obstacle in front of us”²²⁷ in the material sense, Joerling admits that “my muddled brain started to see things”.²²⁸ In a realm where all charts are of no use to them, he is consumed by the terrifying thought that not only are the outward senses of the crew being misled and this vision of land is “an illusion fooling us”,²²⁹ but also by the haunting notion that everything they now take to be real may just be “a mirage, a shadow with no substance”.²³⁰ Joerling’s worst fears are catastrophically confirmed when the ‘Halbrane’ runs aground not on the Antarctic shore but on a colossal iceberg [Fig. 31].

²²⁴ Ibid, p 180.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid, p 179.

²²⁷ Ibid, p 180.

²²⁸ Ibid, p 179.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.



Fig. 31: The ‘Halbrane’ run aground on an iceberg

In other words, rather than insisting that science can elucidate all the enigmas of creation, in *The Sphinx* Verne utilises the form of Gothic ambiguity developed by Poe in order to represent the mystery which continued to surround the Antarctic realms. However, the question of exactly how his Gothic technique functions requires greater analysis. Daniel Compère has written that while their speculative content has always been acknowledged, because of their interaction with “realist discourse”²³¹ Verne’s engagement with the Gothic has generally been overlooked, even though in his opinion “[T]he interest found in Jules Verne’s texts is that these two types of writing co-exist”.²³² Compère argues that the form of the Gothic found in Verne’s fiction is one “that we observe and define by

²³¹ Daniel Compère, ‘L’Incertain’ in François Raymond ed., *Jules Verne: 5* (Paris: Minard, 1987), p 15. “discours réaliste”.

²³² Ibid. “L’intérêt que présente le texte de Jules Verne, est que ces deux types de discours s’y côtoient”.

its characteristic: ‘the uncertainty’”,²³³ which “produces an uncertain effect in so far as the person/author/reader questions the value of a given explanation or the significance of the absence of explanation”.²³⁴

The affinity between this formulation of the Gothic and the Polar Regions becomes clearer when we consider Compère’s contention that “[T]he uncertain can also be brought about by a situation close to inexplicable where it is not the knowledge which is lacking but how to describe it”.²³⁵ This is the predicament which Joerling repeatedly confronts in Verne’s novel. In the extreme conditions of the far south, where so much appears uncertain, he must fight to prevent this ambiguity from overtaking everything and making language useless. As in *Arthur Gordon Pym*, in the course of the narrative we follow the protagonist’s journey from a world which can be ‘read’ and described without difficulty to a Gothic reality containing phenomena so fantastic that a work which Joerling took to be a fiction may in fact be authentic.

As noted above, it is the overwhelming indeterminacy of Verne’s Antarctic “land of desolation and silence”,²³⁶ its jarring refusal to adhere to either version of the far south, which makes it a Gothic zone. Faced with the prospect of being confined for many months in a frozen labyrinth made up of “oddities, improbabilities, and puzzlements”,²³⁷ Joerling realises that his own polar experiences have scarcely been less strange than Pym’s. Trying to reconcile what he thought he knew about the Antarctic with what he has discovered there, his mind is only beset by “[a] thousand contradictions”.²³⁸ When the ‘Halbrane’ is destroyed in a calamitous attempt to dislodge it from the huge iceberg, Joerling, Dirk

²³³ Ibid, p 16. “que nous observons et que nous définissons par sa caractéristique: l’*incertain*”.

²³⁴ Ibid, p 20. “produit un effet d’incertain dans la mesure où le personnage/l’auteur/le lecteur s’interroge sur la valeur de l’explication donnée ou sur la signification de l’absence d’explication”.

²³⁵ Ibid. “L’incertain peut aussi être amené par une situation proche de l’inexplicable: tel est le cas de l’indescriptible où ce n’est plus le savoir qui manqué, mais le savoir-dire”.

²³⁶ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 392.

²³⁷ Ibid, p 140.

²³⁸ Ibid, p 136.

Peters (who has joined the crew under the alias 'Hunt') and the rest of the survivors are marooned and drift for days in an immensity of uncharted space.

Approaching the extreme south from the opposite direction to the route taken by Carsten Borchgrevink in 1895, Verne is no longer constrained by the need to incorporate authentic geographical details or to recreate the content of Pym's narrative, and is able to draw up his own map of the Antarctic interior. As late as 1855, the pioneering American oceanographer and polar scientist Matthew Fontaine Maury (whom Verne directly refers to in chapter twenty-six of *The Sphinx*) had argued that there were "facts and circumstances which suggest a mildness of climate about the South Pole",²³⁹ quite "unlike the Arctic for rigor and severity",²⁴⁰ which "plead most eloquently the cause of exploration there".²⁴¹ In his work *The Physical Geography of the Sea and its Meteorology* (1855), Maury proposed that the currents and winds of the polar sea kept it unfrozen for much of the year, during which time an expedition might reach any uncharted southern territories. Playing upon the speculations about whether these "mysterious regions"²⁴² contained "either island or continent"²⁴³ which had dominated Antarctic discourse from the 1830s onward, Verne, in a sense, confirms both hypotheses by inventing a polar landmass bisected by a passage as wide as an ocean.

He also introduces other elements which only add to its overwhelming uncertainty. Brilliantly constructing a parallel between the ambivalence of natural phenomena and the phantasmal creations of the imagination, the iceberg bearing Verne's travellers is engulfed in an "impregnable coat"²⁴⁴ of fog so abnormally dense that it drowns out all light and sound, leading Joerling to fear that the "air's composition seemed to be changing, as if it

²³⁹ Matthew Fontaine Maury, *The Physical Geography of the Sea and its Meteorology* ed. John Leighly (New York: Dover Publications, 2003), p 406.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 140.

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p 214.

were transforming into a solid state”.²⁴⁵ As they no longer “have confidence in what our compass indicated”,²⁴⁶ the sailor’s fears about what lies at the Pole multiply now that they can neither see nor hear anything. The effects of this unnatural fog (almost a physical manifestation of the doubt which afflicts the polar explorers now that they are completely cut off from the known world) even cause Joerling to fall “under the sway of a sort of hallucination”,²⁴⁷ so that he passes over the earth’s axis in trancelike state.

Heading north to escape the “darkness of a polar night”,²⁴⁸ Joerling and the others also bear witness to an even more otherworldly form of Antarctic magic. Bringing together a seemingly impossible combination of opposites, Verne’s heroes are caught in an “electric snowstorm”,²⁴⁹ composed of “huge fluffy flakes that shot out tufts of light when they touched you”,²⁵⁰ a Gothic marvel easily “as amazing as the ones filling up Pym’s narrative”.²⁵¹ As with Pym, Joerling can only make conjectures about the causes of these bizarre phenomena and never discovers their true cause. These wonders belong to a different world, one where the natural order contains things so fantastic that they cannot easily be distinguished from the supernatural.

These inexplicable phenomena are, of course, merely a preparation for Joerling’s discovery of the Antarctic’s crowning enigma. Earlier, in chapter twenty-two, he yet again lapses into semi-consciousness, his brain crowded with grotesquely symbolic polar fantasies. Imagining himself as a seeker after “the secrets of those mysterious regions”,²⁵² in his sleeping mind he sees “a sort of sphinx towering over the polar ice cap”²⁵³ who possesses the key to all of the continent’s miracles. Finally reaching the ends of the earth in

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p 219.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p 253.

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p 249.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Ibid, p 185.

²⁵³ Ibid.

reality nine chapters later, Joerling finds no trace of the strange sights described by Pym but instead he is horrified to behold the “mythic monster”²⁵⁴ from his dreams rising up before him. However, while it is quickly revealed as a rock formation and not the enormous beast which Joerling in his “unreasoning, unreasonable fear”²⁵⁵ briefly mistakes it for, this sphinx is still a keeper of secrets. [Fig. 32]



Fig. 32: The Antarctic Sphinx

As Joerling deduces, this curious rock is a huge lodestone which has become positioned on the earth’s axis “like a sort of giant attracting device”.²⁵⁶ As one who has been seized from his ordinary place in the world by a desire to venture south which even

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p 250.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, p 253.

he cannot entirely fathom, Joerling wonders whether this fantastic figure, which evokes “sensations no written or spoken words can convey”,²⁵⁷ has all along been “pulling us towards it with the power of its magnetic attraction”.²⁵⁸ This notion that the sphinx’s electromagnetic influence extends to human beings, and may even have a psychological dimension, seems to be confirmed by another gruesome discovery. Eternally “clamped to the side of the rock formation”,²⁵⁹ is the ossified body of the explorer who has set this entire sequence of “strange adventures” in motion, Arthur Gordon Pym.

A victim of “the monster’s zone of attraction”,²⁶⁰ this climactic image of Pym’s wizened cadaver held fast to the base of the sphinx is a Gothic symbol which encapsulates Verne’s perception of the Antarctic as a realm in which human nature becomes grotesquely distorted. Having imagined him as an almost mythic figure, the “bold trailblazer of the Antarctic”²⁶¹ and the “fierce guardian of the South Pole”,²⁶² Joerling now sees only another hapless victim of the far south. Prematurely ravaged and ancient as though these regions have drained his very youth away, all that remains of Pym is “a skeleton covered with skin, which the polar cold had kept intact and which preserved a corpselike rigidity”.²⁶³ Caught in the Antarctic’s terrible power, he is now destined to remain its captive for all time.

In a sense, Pym’s Gothic fate is the same as that of Verne’s earlier polar explorer. As Henri Zukowski has written, “[T]he text repeats exactly the same processes used in *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*: when a particularly energetic man whose forces are connected and aimed into a project, finally achieves his goal, high electro-volcanic or electro-magnetic energy in the centre of the low energies of the polar cold, he is destroyed

²⁵⁷ Ibid p 254.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p 255.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid, p 35.

²⁶² Ibid, p 185.

²⁶³ Ibid, p 255.

psychologically or physically: the most powerful energy source triumphs”.²⁶⁴ Pym has confronted the sphinx of the Pole, but unlike Oedipus he has not survived the encounter. Now his petrified remains shall stay perpetually enclosed within its unbreakable magnetic embrace.

With the source of the South Pole’s colossal consuming power identified and the riddle of Pym’s fate conclusively solved, on a superficial level at least Verne’s novel does appear to banish the mysteries with which Poe had enshrouded the Antarctic. However, all is again not what it seems. Although Verne creates the impression that it is based on legitimate scientific principles, in actuality his ‘naturalising’ explanation of the mysteries of the Pole is a blatant piece of pseudoscience which, much like the verisimilitude of Poe’s original story, is only coherent within the context of his invented universe. Instead of attempting to depict the wonders of the far south in a rigorously scientific fashion and without any metaphysical intrigue, Verne has only exchanged the Gothic landscape of Poe’s polar fantasy for one with a denser facade of contrived scientific detail. His continuation is finally no different than Poe’s source text, insofar as both works exemplify how literature, in Luckhurst’s words, has ways “of generating stories from the margins of normal and the intervals of extraordinary science”.²⁶⁵

To conclude this section, if the discovery of the sphinx in chapter thirty-one is ultimately more mystifying than anything else this explains why, in the final chapter which follows it, Joerling’s relief at his imminent return home is overshadowed by persistent doubts about what he and his companions have managed to achieve. Sailing north in a

²⁶⁴ Henri Zukowski ‘Boussoles’ in. *Jules Verne 6: “Le Science en question,”* p43. “Le texte répète exactement le processus mis à l’œuvre dans *Les Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras*; quand un homme particulièrement énergique, dont toutes les forces sont branchées et vectorisées dans un projet, atteint enfin son but, haute énergie électro-volcanique ou électro-magnétique au centre des basses énergies du froid polaire, il est anéanti, psychiquement ou physiquement: la plus puissante source énergétique triomphe”.

²⁶⁵ *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, p 405.

small open boat “through the semidarkness of the Antarctic night”,²⁶⁶ Joerling is incapable of determining whether their perilous journey has truly been worthwhile. Although he knows that their voyage has seen them push “closer to the South Pole than anyone before us”,²⁶⁷ make their way “past the very tip of the planet earth’s axis”,²⁶⁸ and name the distant lands they found there, these acts have in some way already begun to lose their meaning for him. As the ship heads for the familiarity and safety of the Pacific Ocean, Joerling conclude that the polar zone exerts “a mental and physical influence no-one can escape”.²⁶⁹ He has left the Antarctic behind, but his mind shall linger there forever.

Following the pattern of *Arthur Gordon Pym* and *Captain Hatteras*, the misguided dream that any simple answers awaited the ‘Halbrane’ in these regions has turned into a polar nightmare. Although Joerling and the others simply wished to put to rest the various questions which preoccupied them, by crossing the Antarctic Circle they have only brought calamity and mystification upon themselves. As Verne’s last engagement with the theme of the Polar Regions, *The Sphinx* therefore underlines the impression of these geographical enigmas as spaces where disaster is inescapable: such voyages are, by their very nature, acts of absurd folly. In the novel’s final chapter, starkly entitled ‘Twelve out of Seventy!’,²⁷⁰ Verne sets out the human cost of the polar surveys of the ‘Jane Guy’ and the ‘Halbrane’, noting that those who have participated in them have endured nothing but “great hardship, great suffering, great danger, and above all dreadful anxiety”,²⁷¹ and most have failed to return home. In his Gothic vision these latitudes are somewhere man’s

²⁶⁶ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 257.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p 259.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p 257.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p 256.

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, p 257.

hubris should not take him, for this will invariably be “a foolhardy move, a lunatic move that would lead to disaster”.²⁷²

As he waits for rescue, Joerling’s thoughts turn to the voyages of the U.S. Exploring Expedition and the French captain Dumont d’Urville, who have also been traversing the same Antarctic latitudes, and then to Poe’s dead hero. Joerling may not have seen the polar vortex or its shrouded white guardian, but he has constantly found phenomena bearing uncanny resemblances to those things he read of in Pym’s account. The ocean passage dividing the polar landmass so closely matching Pym’s open sea, the atmospheric radiance of the polar aurora strongly reminiscent of the unearthly flickering lights Pym observes on the horizon in the closing episode of his narrative, and the lastly the great, sphinx-shaped mountain which may or may not have been the snow-white colossus: All of these resemble features of Pym’s narrative, but none have been similar enough for Joerling to conclude that they were the things Pym described.

Verne leaves the reader exactly where Poe did, encircled by mystifications. Unable to draw any clear demarcation between all these polar fantasies and realities even after he has explored these realms for himself, Joerling can only maintain that “discoveries of great value are still to be made in those waterways”.²⁷³ Writing about this strange ambivalence in Verne’s work, Brigitte Nerlich has posed the question, “[B]y this reversal between the impossible and the reality, does Verne want to tell us that beyond all that the natural sciences can reveal of this world we inhabit, there remains always a mysterious hidden underside, inexpressible nuances, lost perspectives and unachievable aspirations which can only be expressed by myth?”²⁷⁴ He has attempted to retrace Pym’s legendary adventure

²⁷² Ibid, p 152.

²⁷³ Ibid, p 259.

²⁷⁴ Brigitte Nerlich, ‘*Voyage à travers L’impossible, pièce fantastique*: Essai d’interprétation fantastique’ in François Raymond ed., *Jules Verne: 5* (Paris: Minard, 1987), p 121. “Par ce renversement entre l’impossible et le réel, Verne veut-il nous dire, que par-delà tout ce que les sciences naturelles pourront reveller de ce

and found only shadows and suggestions of what his narrative claimed to be there, but this merely raises the disturbing possibility that the next team of explorers may reach an Antarctic nothing like the one which Joerling has now described. In a final allusion to Poe, Joerling writes that the pages of his narrative have not been “stuck inside a bottle, tossed overboard, and fished up by chance from the seas of the Antarctic”²⁷⁵ and he has “brought them back in person”,²⁷⁶ but this does not mean that his version of the far south is any less susceptible to being re-written.

In this way, even though the surviving crew of the ‘Halbrane’ have made it back to civilisation after charting the Antarctic’s innermost realms, it still remains impossible to be sure what they contain. It is this haunting inability to conclusively say what the Antarctic is, the sense that it is an ultimately unresolvable space and an ever-reconfiguring labyrinth, which is the essence of the Gothic terror of *The Sphinx*. In light of this nightmarish possibility of endless reinterpretation, the only thing Joerling knows for certain is that the saga of the ‘Halbrane’ shall not be the last word on the matter. The white world’s everlasting riddle means that its hold over the human mind remains undiminished, and inevitably more like him will find their path into south. As he observes, “Others must travel it again, others must visit the sphinx of the Ice Realm and wrest from it the final secrets of the mysterious Antarctic!”²⁷⁷

monde où nous sommes, il reste toujours un dessous mystérieux, des nuances inexprimables, des perspectives perdues, des aspirations irréalisables qui ne peuvent être exprimées que par le mythe?”

²⁷⁵ *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, p 256.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p 259

Chapter Four:

“Great God! this is an Awful Place... ”:¹ The Heroic Age, the Quest for the Polar Interior, and the Return of the Antarctic Gothic

¹ Robert Falcon Scott, Max Jones ed., *Journals: Captain Scott's Last Expedition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p 376.

Introduction

In the brief history of travel to the far south which precedes his memoir *The Worst Journey in the World*, the English explorer Apsley Cherry-Garrard dismayingly notes the “cold reception”² which James Clark Ross received on his return to Britain in September 1843. Having locating the North Magnetic Pole in 1831, nine years later Ross led his expedition into the Antarctic with the aim of repeating his earlier triumph there. Although he was unable to accomplish this, Ross not only confirmed that a considerable body of land existed in the proximity of the South Pole but made many other significant discoveries. These included an inlet of the polar ocean whose waters remained comparatively unfrozen (which became known as the Ross Sea), the rugged, forbidding mass of Franklin Island, and another, much larger island (which was eventually named after Ross by Scott) whose twin volcanic peaks were later transformed into the fiery ‘Mount Yaanek’, which presides over “the ultimate climes of the Pole”³ in Poe’s poem ‘Ulalume’ (1847).

In this way, along with the Wilkes Exploring Expedition the intrepid voyages of Ross’s ships ‘Erebus’ and ‘Terror’ formed the concluding episode of the inaugural chapter of Antarctic exploration. Reaching further than anyone before them, Wilkes and Ross brought the first phase of Antarctic exploration to a close by navigating the Southern Ocean, and they recognised that it would take an entirely new kind of expedition to conquer Antarctica itself. Although neither made a landing on the Antarctic mainland, both tracked its coastline for hundreds of miles and concluded that in more favourable conditions a well-equipped expedition could gain access to its inner realms, cross the desolate spaces at the floor of the world, and claim the Pole. Nevertheless, the melancholy

² Apsley Cherry-Garrard, Sara Wheeler ed., *The Worst Journey in the World: Antarctica 1910-13* (London: Pimlico, 2003), p xxvi.

³ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘Ulalume – A Ballad’ in Thomas Ollive Mabbott ed., *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. 1: Poems* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969) p 416.

picture of an apparently desolate landmass conjured up by these expeditions meant that they were greeted with indifference, and no further voyages were made to the Antarctic for more than half a century. Consequently, there remained much mystery about what exactly lay undiscovered in the extreme southern latitudes.

When the South Polar Regions once again became the focus of international attention in the early 1890s they assumed a very different significance. The period which followed would become known as the Heroic Age of Antarctic exploration: this was the era of such celebrated figures as Robert Falcon Scott, Ernest Shackleton, Roald Amundsen and Cherry-Garrard himself, whose legendary exploits while attempting to overcome the intensely punishing conditions of the far south would eventually define humanity's relationship with the Antarctic continent. The Heroic Age also saw the re-emergence of the Antarctic Gothic sub-genre, as a number of authors looked upon these new attempts by science to unlock the secrets of this far southern world not as something which rendered this mode of fiction obsolete but which invested it with a renewed relevance and artistic scope. Elizabeth Leane has written that when the Heroic Age commenced novelists and short-story writers eventually "found inspiration"⁴ in the "real-life Antarctic narratives"⁵ which readers had begun to consume with enormous enthusiasm.

However, the true nature of the interaction between the Gothic imagination and exploration history was much more complex than Leane suggests. The next two chapters shall be devoted to critical analyses of H.P. Lovecraft's *At the Mountains of Madness* and John W. Campbell Jr.'s 'Who Goes There?', and will reveal how these works find Gothic resonances in the very ideas underlying the second phase of the Heroic Age. Both texts imaginatively transform the imagery associated with the later stages of the Heroic Age into a series of Gothic motifs, and incorporate the modern ways in which humanity had begun

⁴ Elizabeth Leane, *Antarctica in Fiction: Imaginative Narratives of the Far South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p 68.

⁵ Ibid.

to regard the unfathomed immensity of the Antarctic by recasting these new perceptions as the basis for elemental horror. In the same manner as *Arthur Gordon Pym* and *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, Lovecraft and Campbell's fictions also form part of a counter-narrative to the accepted account of south polar exploration. The precise nature of these intricate connections shall be examined in the analyses of the texts themselves, but one aim of the present chapter is to challenge the view that the Heroic Age merely formed the historical backdrop for this phase of Antarctic Gothic literature.

Acting as an introduction to the discussion of the Heroic Age in specific relation to Lovecraft and Campbell's texts, this chapter shall consider its ramifications for the Antarctic Gothic in more general terms. As the era in which more expeditions ventured south than at any other point in history, the Heroic Age revolutionised human thinking about the Antarctic. This chapter shall consider how the deeds and words of Scott, Shackleton, and other polar explorers determined how the readers of this time imagined this persistently enigmatic domain. Although numerous voyagers had attempted to reach the far south, it was only in the first decade of the twentieth century that the comprehensive exploration of the Antarctic continent was recognised as a scientific project of the highest priority. Furthermore, the Edwardian era also saw Antarctic exploration develop into a pervasive cultural phenomenon. The search for the South Pole became one of the defining narratives of the epoch, a real-life adventure story which engrossed the attention of readers across the globe with such force that they too felt they were involved in the endeavour.

The first section of this chapter shall examine the different arguments, scientific, political and cultural, which brought about the Heroic Age. Despite the sense of confidence and bravado which surrounded the revival of British Antarctic exploration in particular, underlying the Heroic Age's mask of patriotic zeal was a set of deep-rooted doubts and insecurities. As this section will assess, the necessity of claiming the South Pole was

ideologically linked to an array of fears about Britain's waning influence as an imperial power, the stark implications of Darwinism, and concerns about the degeneration of the national character. The figure of the Heroic Age Antarctic explorer (a curious outgrowth of the Victorian fascination with scientific progress and Edwardian metaphysical theory) shall be considered as a potent mythopoeic archetype, an embodiment of both the highest virtues of the past and the qualities which would guarantee that the nation would retain its superiority in a more technologically-advanced future.

In addition to producing a new breed of conceptually-laden polar explorers, the Heroic Age also saw the image of Antarctica transform from an unattainable Thule to an unblemished space for cultivating and sustaining the finest human characteristics. As each expedition agonisingly pushed its way towards the centre of the continent, the speculative notions of the past were replaced with a set of geographical facts. However, these journeys into the depths of the unknown simultaneously revived the Gothic vision of the South Polar Regions as a malevolent, abnormal space. The Heroic Age was founded on the belief that a combination of careful planning, scientific expertise and stoic effort would see mankind prevail, but as one expedition after another descended into catastrophe and the Antarctic ice proved a truly deadly enemy, the sheer scale and complexity of the undertaking became evident. No episode of the Heroic Age demonstrated the terrible hazardousness of the polar quest more than the British Antarctic Expedition of 1910, which concluded with the loss of Scott and four of his officers and Roald Amundsen's claiming of the Pole for Norway.

On their far southern journeys, Scott and Shackleton came face to face with a world which was often as wondrously strange and fantastic as any found in fiction. They were challenged not merely by its unforgiving environmental conditions but also by a debilitating uncertainty which afflicted their senses. Time and again they discovered that these frozen realms could undermine their ability to perceive reality, and their published

narratives only reinforced the concept of the Antarctic as somewhere fearful, beyond intellectual limits, and outside of the natural world itself. The second section of this chapter shall be devoted to a reading of John Martin Leahy's short story 'In Amundsen's Tent' (1928), in which the Antarctic's overwhelming 'Otherness' and its inherent capacity to mislead the human mind are integral to the narrative's phantasmagoric Gothic terror.

Although a work by an American writer which was not published until after the first phase of the Heroic Age had reached its end, Leahy's tale opposes the view of polar exploration as a noble adventure espoused in the preceding period by depicting it as a headlong plunge into incomprehensible mystery. Incorporating authentic historical events and details, the unearthly horrors of Leahy's tale are ones which arise out of the perplexing and relativistic nature of Antarctic experience. Furthermore, 'In Amundsen's Tent' shall be shown to be a work which probes the entire range of fears and anxieties which the Heroic Age was partly conceived to ameliorate. By considering its gothicisation of the body, its investigation into what can and cannot be expressed, and its depiction of the Antarctic as an amorphous, voracious landscape whose isolating effects cast doubt on the notion of an objective 'truth', this chapter will argue that Leahy's transitional text both responds to the first phase of the Heroic Age and prefigures several themes which found more complete articulation in Lovecraft and Campbell's works a decade later.

Section 1: The Heroic Age, Edwardian Anxieties and the Changing Face of the Antarctic

In July 1895 the International Geographical Congress met in London and was addressed by Sir Clements Markham, the president of the Royal Geographical Society. A veteran of Arctic exploration himself, Markham had participated in the greatest saga to involve the Polar Regions during the nineteenth century: the search for Sir John Franklin's Northwest Passage expedition, which went missing in the Canadian Arctic in 1845. For some time Markham had been trying to convince the Admiralty, Colonial Office and Foreign Office that a well-planned expedition was needed to officially add the Antarctic territories to the British Empire. Initially ignored, Markham used the occasion of the Geographical Congress to agitate for Antarctic exploration by impressing upon its delegates the vital importance of venturing below the Antarctic Circle.

Having previously made a case for an Antarctic expedition on scientific grounds, this time Markham employed a new strategy to "stir up British enthusiasm once more in favour of the unknown attractions of the South Pole",⁶ as one newspaper phrased it. Drawing out the implications of what Ross had found there, Markham proposed that if an exploration party managed to reach the Antarctic landmass by way of the Ross Sea there was every reason why it would be able to claim the South Pole itself, a feat which he later said would demonstrate "the indomitable pluck and perseverance of the race".⁷ Before the Congress was concluded, Markham had won over the delegates with his argument that the conquest of the Antarctic now constituted "the greatest piece of geographical exploration still to be undertaken".⁸ In this way, he formally established the Antarctic as the setting for

⁶ 'The New President of the Royal Geographical Society', *The Times*, November 14th 1893, p 9.

⁷ 'An Antarctic Conference', *The Times*, July 7th 1897, p 5.

⁸ Quoted in Edward J. Larson, *An Empire of Ice: Scott, Shackleton, and the Heroic Age of Antarctic Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p 45.

a modern-day crusade, a monumental contest involving several of the world's most powerful nations in which the South Pole would be the elusive prize.

Two years earlier, in his provocative inaugural address to the RGS, Markham had expressed “a certain patriotic regret of the fact that the two principal Arctic expeditions of the moment are being carried out by foreigners”.⁹ Aware that other countries (most notably Germany, Norway and Belgium) were contemplating mounting Antarctic expeditions of their own, Markham shrewdly judged that this dimension of inter-imperial rivalry would now give his calls for a British expedition a vital urgency. However, Markham no more regarded Antarctic exploration as simply an exercise in propaganda than as a purely scientific undertaking. Instead, he eagerly portrayed the mapping of the last major uncharted region of the earth as a venture which would cultivate the finest human qualities by encouraging British explorers to accomplish exceptional feats of strength and bravery. Markham perceived the extreme south as a challenging environment which would present daring Englishmen with an outstanding opportunity to, as he put it, “acquire valuable experiences and to perform deeds of derring doe”,¹⁰ and he intended his polar expedition to be a celebration of what Stephen J. Pyne has described as “a nobler dimension of the age”.¹¹

Markham was assisted in his campaign by the oceanographer Sir John Murray, who held similar views about the unique scientific and cultural importance of the far south. In a lecture entitled ‘The Renewal of Antarctic Exploration’ delivered two weeks after Markham was installed as its president, Murray explained to the RGS why Britain should begin this work immediately, and why it was a project fit for Englishmen. He observed that

⁹ ‘The New President of the Royal Geographical Society’, *The Times*, November 14th 1893, p 9.

¹⁰ Quoted in David Day, *Antarctica: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p 99.

¹¹ Stephen J. Pyne, *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1986) p 171.

so long as the “actual state of our knowledge of the region”¹² continued to be “extremely meagre”¹³ there were “many problems in science that must remain unsolved”.¹⁴ However, Murray also gave his argument a pronounced nationalistic slant. He warned that it was now the prevailing view that Britain was “being outstripped by foreigners in the cultivation of almost all departments of scientific work”.¹⁵ A successful result in the South Polar Regions would prove that “we had to acknowledge no superiors, or even equals, in this branch of investigation”,¹⁶ and reaffirm that “British science would always lead the way in this direction”.¹⁷

As well as its “powers of defence and attack”,¹⁸ Murray reminded the RGS that the prestige of the British Navy equally derived from its “glorious conquests over the powers of nature”.¹⁹ Historically, he stated that Britain “had frequently sent forth expeditions, the primary object of which was the acquisition of new knowledge”,²⁰ and he believed it would be a disastrous error if there were “no successor”²¹ to these. Murray claimed that “a steady, continuous, laborious, and systematic exploration of the whole southern region with all the appliances of modern investigation”²² would allow “the officers and men of the present generation”²³ to aspire to the same level of greatness as exalted figures like Cook. In this way, Murray assured his audience that Antarctic exploration was an undertaking “worthy of the maritime position and the scientific reputation of this great Empire”.²⁴

¹² Sir John Murray, ‘Antarctic Exploration’ *The Times*, November 28th 1893, p 11.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

While it might have appeared that Markham and Murray were calling for an Antarctic exploration project which would be essentially the same as the nation's lengthy Arctic campaign, this was not entirely the case. In 1895 an anonymous article in *The Times* entitled 'The Unknown Continent' compared Britain's reasons for venturing south to the ones which had time and again taken English explorers to the extreme north. The author wrote that besides the search for the Northwest Passage itself, the strategic importance of the North Polar Regions, their varied commercial possibilities, and a "general air of romance"²⁵ had traditionally made them "much more attractive to the explorer, the adventurer, the sportsman, the whaler, than the corresponding region at the other end of the earth".²⁶ In other words, it was the basic compatibility between the Arctic latitudes and the rest of the unexplored territories of the globe which explained why "[f]or some 350 years it has been besieged by expedition after expedition"²⁷ and become "a favourite field for adventure".²⁸

As the author observed, it was the Antarctic's continuing lack of any definite connection to the rest of the planet which now formed the reason why an exploratory voyage should be sent there. "Excursion steamers"²⁹ were taking tourists to the Arctic coast, a British training squadron had "played cricket at midnight within 500 miles of the North Pole",³⁰ and this polar territory had been so extensively investigated that it could "very well be left to take care of itself".³¹ Meanwhile, mankind's knowledge of the Antarctic, a geographical space "the size of Europe",³² was still "mainly conjectural".³³ The Ross expedition had brought back a quantity of data so extensive that specialists in

²⁵ Anonymous, 'The Unknown Continent', *The Times*, November 12th 1895, p 4.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

many fields had been “working out the results for twenty years”.³⁴ Indeed, the article stated that an increasing number of experts were now convinced that within the Antarctic’s “inhospitable boundaries lies the solution to many scientific problems of the first importance”.³⁵

Once more, the scientific justifications for exploring this “ice-bound continent”³⁶ were allied to a notion of patriotic obligation. As the same article put it, for Britain the task of thoroughly investigating “the greatest unknown area on the face of the globe”³⁷ was “to some extent its duty”.³⁸ In its words, Britain could not afford to “sit tamely by and see another nation doing single-handed the work which for many reasons is peculiarly hers”.³⁹ Cook, Franklin, and Ross were “among the heroes and demigods of whom the nation is proud”,⁴⁰ and by resuming Antarctic exploration a new generation of men of this kind would inevitably emerge. Whatever the objections of the “unimaginative utilitarian”,⁴¹ the article proclaimed that returning to the far south would be integral in “maintaining the enterprise of the British seaman”.⁴²

The rate at which these notions were embraced is evident from the degree to which they were echoed in the debate which persisted for the rest of the century. In 1897 another article posited that the “enthusiasm for polar exploration is always more or less latent in the British public”,⁴³ but now that “the idea of a British Antarctic expedition”⁴⁴ was once more “in the air”⁴⁵ it had “been easily fanned to a glowing heat”.⁴⁶ This article also argued

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ ‘The Renewal of Antarctic Exploration’ *The Times*, April 12th 1897, p 10.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

that “the accumulated glory which is the heritage of every Briton has been derived from the adventures of those countrymen who have pushed their way with success into the unknown lands and seas of the globe”.⁴⁷ Since those Englishmen who had sought out “the ice-bound ends”⁴⁸ of the planet held “first place”⁴⁹ in this sphere of activity, the article stated that the Empire must not “allow her duty to devolve upon others”.⁵⁰ A naval expedition to chart “the great blank which caps the southern end of the earth”⁵¹ would not only be “popular all over the kingdom”⁵² and produce a set of results which would be “full of interest”⁵³: claiming the Antarctic Pole would “save the credit”⁵⁴ of the nation, for it would mark a return to “those great exploring enterprises which crowned England with glory”.⁵⁵

For all the scientific expertise involved, Markham also maintained that the qualities of character which would be displayed in reaching the Pole would prove to all that the days of the Empire were far from over. In a public letter to the Prime Minister Lord Salisbury, he depicted Antarctic exploration as finally no different from any of the great naval undertakings which the nation specialised in, and from which “the whole civilized world”⁵⁶ had “derived benefit”.⁵⁷ He insisted that it “was not a time for our country, so long the mother of discovery and of maritime enterprise, to abdicate her leading position”.⁵⁸ His views were endorsed by the president of the Royal Naval College, Admiral Richard Vesey Hamilton. Another veteran of the Franklin search, Hamilton argued that if the government did not back Markham’s plans Britain would surely join the ranks of those countries which

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Clements Markham, ‘The Government and Antarctic Exploration’, *The Times*, January 30th, 1898, p 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

had “lost their maritime supremacy when they ceased to be in the van of exploration”.⁵⁹ He lamented that the nation’s greatness must be “founded on quicksand”⁶⁰ if it were true that the navy “cannot spare eight or nine lieutenants”⁶¹ to make a voyage of discovery to the far south. He too upheld the view that “England was made by its adventurers”,⁶² and a new polar expedition would demonstrate that “there are numbers of them still in existence”⁶³ who were “ready to undergo hardships and run all risks for the advancement of science”.⁶⁴

Thanks to Markham and his followers, the cultural perception of Antarctic exploration shifted radically. Until then this massive uncharted expanse at the base of the globe had remained a geographical curiosity of genuine interest only to a relatively small number of explorers and naturalists, and many were baffled why the RS and RGS took the unprecedented step of combining their forces to send an expedition there. Within only six years of Markham’s address to the IGC, the British press had begun to refer to this expedition as the ‘National Antarctic Expedition’, the ‘Polar Campaign’, and finally ‘Captain Scott’s Expedition’. In this way, by the start of the 20th century, Edward J. Larson writes that the Antarctic’s “crystalline sea or field of ice”⁶⁵ had become widely accepted “as a fitting stage for humankind’s heroic struggle against fate, nature, or futility”.⁶⁶ As one contemporary columnist wrote, the millions of square miles which made up this unknown continent would be an enormous advantage to the Empire for they constituted “a splendid school for the exercise of the best qualities of a seaman”,⁶⁷ and would ensure that

⁵⁹ Sir Richard Vesey Hamilton, ‘Antarctic Exploration’, *The Times*, July 25th 1898, p 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ *An Empire of Ice*, p249.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Anonymous, ‘National Antarctic Expedition’, June 23rd 1899, p 8.

Britain's position as the world's foremost exploring power would "be maintained by her sons".⁶⁸

As these opinions clearly reveal, the renewal of interest in the Antarctic was a development deeply interconnected with a complex of anxieties about Britain's uncertain geopolitical standing at the close of the nineteenth century and the changing identity of its people. In the deflated aftermath of the Boer War, a period H.G. Wells described as characterised by "badly strained optimism"⁶⁹ and "acute disillusionments",⁷⁰ the Antarctic quest was promoted as an endeavour which would restore confidence in the national character. If Britain could be first to the Pole, it would regain its reputation as the nation capable of accomplishing anything. The lacklustre performance of British forces against the Boers also created widespread concern about the virility of the country's young men (something which led the government to form an Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration in 1902, which produced an alarming report about the nation's physical and mental well-being). An archetypal Edwardian, a breed of Englishman whom Francis Spufford has described as obsessed with "pushing things to their limit",⁷¹ Markham sought to push the limits of human nature itself. In a world in which fickle political allegiances, uncontrollable economic forces, and an increasingly manifest disenchantment with organised religion were erasing old certainties, Markham had a vision of the Antarctic as a place of ancient purity which would become a training academy for nothing less than the greatest kind of human beings.

Furthermore, the debate about returning south as well as these fears of degeneration were both related to the intellectual crisis which had engulfed British society by this time. In the eyes of many, Darwinism had left humanity trapped in a materialistic, mechanistic

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ H.G. Wells, *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* (London: Macmillan, 1914) p 259.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Francis Spufford, *I May Be Some Time* (London: Faber, 1996), p 264.

universe in which traditional values had no meaning, and the years which followed saw various thinkers (most notably the physicist and spiritualist Sir Oliver Lodge and the founder of the Society for Psychical Research Frederick W.H. Myers) propose their own alternatives to this theory. As Samuel Hynes has noted, “Victorian science may have made metaphysics obsolete, but it had not destroyed men’s metaphysical itch”,⁷² and he holds that “much of what one might generally call Edwardian science”⁷³ was in fact “concerned with the problem of restoring metaphysics to the human world”.⁷⁴ Solving the mystery of Antarctica, one of the greatest scientific projects proposed in this era, was also portrayed in some quarters as a form of spiritual mission calling for an explorer who was not only the embodiment of physical perfection but who also possessed an enlarged, transcendental view of things greater than that of a mere empiricist. As the reading of ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ in the following section shall assess, these linked Heroic Age discourses about degeneration, Darwinism, and the possibility of overcoming the limitations of the material body all inform Leahy’s tale.

If Heroic Age science depicted the Antarctic as a Gothic realm about which almost nothing was known for certain, it therefore made sense that it would require an extraordinary kind of hero to conquer it. At the same time, the explorers of this era were not the manifestation of a single concept of heroism but reflected a whole range of ideas and values. As the words of Markham, Murray and Hamilton attest, these Antarctic explorers managed to combine an idealised patriotic adventurer, an embodiment of muscular Christianity, a scientific warrior, as well as a seeker after other, more esoteric forms of knowledge. This protean figure was intended to be the very personification of the metaphysic which would allow England to withstand the threat of decay, a beacon to guide

⁷² Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Vintage, 1991), p 134.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

the nation out of the doubt and uncertainty which ravaged the age. By forging a path to the Pole, this hero would revive the values of the past and usher in a new form of greatness.

The drive to acquire foreign territories had utterly transformed the world map during Queen Victoria's reign, but in the Edwardian era this was combined with the urge to document what the individual Englishman would withstand in the name of king and country. According to the rhetoric of the age, the might of the man was depicted as commensurate to the might of his nation. Those who went south would have to be willing to endure the most extreme conditions for the greater good, and this gave the idea of conquering the South Pole a romantic allure in the popular imagination. Britain had already produced Cook and Ross, whom Cherry-Garrard dubbed "the aristocrats of the South",⁷⁵ and a new Antarctic expedition would surely give rise to men who would strive as determinedly, suffer as intensely, and achieve things in every way as splendid. Since the progress of this grand new Antarctic expedition would be closely followed by the public, Markham predicted that these heroes would in turn be emulated by young Englishmen from across the social spectrum.

As the Edwardian era unfolded, the Heroic Age explorers became figures of near-universal interest and they possessed a tremendous symbolic power. In an age in which many were convinced, in the words of Hynes, "that civilisation had declined because mankind had suffered a failure of will",⁷⁶ they were authentic pioneers, determined to bring these unseen and unexplored Antarctic realms under the influence of the Empire and thereby prove that they belonged to a nation still capable of achieving momentous things. When Edward 'Teddy' Evans later paid tribute to Laurence 'Titus' Oates, his companion on Scott's second expedition, in the *Strand Magazine*, the exceptionally manly and clean-

⁷⁵ *The Worst Journey in the World*, p xviii.

⁷⁶ *The Edwardian Turn of Mind*, p 45.

living character he described could have stepped straight from the pages of a story in *The Boy's Own Paper*.

A brave young soldier who enjoyed man-hauling⁷⁷ and traversed the Antarctic wastes like some organic engine “quite unconscious of any personal suffering”,⁷⁸ and an affectionate soul who spoke only “about England and home”,⁷⁹ the Oates of Evans’ essay was an individual who “lived always, as he died, without fear and without reproach”⁸⁰ and set a “glorious example to us all”.⁸¹ As the magazine emphasised, “Truly, of such stuff should the heroes of a nation be!”⁸² This was the Oates of John Charles Dollman’s painting ‘A Very Gallant Gentleman’, [Fig 33] which depicted what the *Strand* described as the officer, his feet cruelly frostbitten, “limping calmly into the blizzard to his death”,⁸³ a potent image which became widely-reproduced in this period. However, before Evans and Oates had even left for the Antarctic, an entire industry had begun to flourish around the patrician figure of the unyielding British South Polar explorer, reflecting the attraction of Markham’s conception of the Antarctic as an arena for reaffirming British supremacy.

⁷⁷ Commander Edward Evans, ‘Captain Oates: My Recollections of a Gallant Comrade’, *Strand Magazine*, December 1913, p 624.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p 618.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p 625.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p 626.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid, p 615.

⁸³ Ibid.

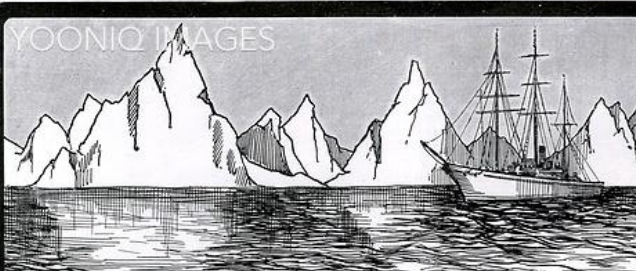


Fig. 33: John Charles Dollman, 'A Very Gallant Gentleman', (1913)

At the height of the Heroic Age, an Edwardian could see the image of these polar crusaders reproduced on the pot of Colman's Mustard they applied to their breakfast bacon, the tins of corned beef or smoked sardines they ate for lunch, and even on bottles of beer and jars of Bovril. In the course of their day, they might have seen advertisements with Scott and Shackleton endorsing Fry's chocolate, Shell Motor Spirit, or clothing made from Wolsey's 'Unshrinkable' Wool. In the evening they could settle down to a mug of Cadbury's Cocoa, the container illustrated with Antarctic scenes, and some Huntley and Palmer 'Polar' Biscuits, imprinted with images of far southern travel. Browsing through a magazine, they might have noticed a large, theatrically contrived photograph of two polar explorers kept robust and cheerful by their intake of Oxo, and another for HMV Gramophones for which Krisraviza the sled-dog had re-enacted the famous pose of Nipper the terrier on McMurdo Sound. Ladies could read about Rosenwald's Patent Corsets, made only with sturdy Antarctic whalebone, and learn why a Singer Sewing Machine had been brought on the latest polar expedition. Children of this time would have asked their fathers

to buy Player's, whose cigarette cards vividly brought to life each new Antarctic adventure.⁸⁴ [Fig. 34, 35, 36, 37, 38]

YOONIQ IMAGES




1911 ANTARCTIC EXPEDITION.

To supply the power for his motor sledges,
with which he hopes to reach the South Pole,

CAPTAIN R. F. SCOTT, R.N.,
CHOSE

"SHELL" MOTOR SPIRIT.



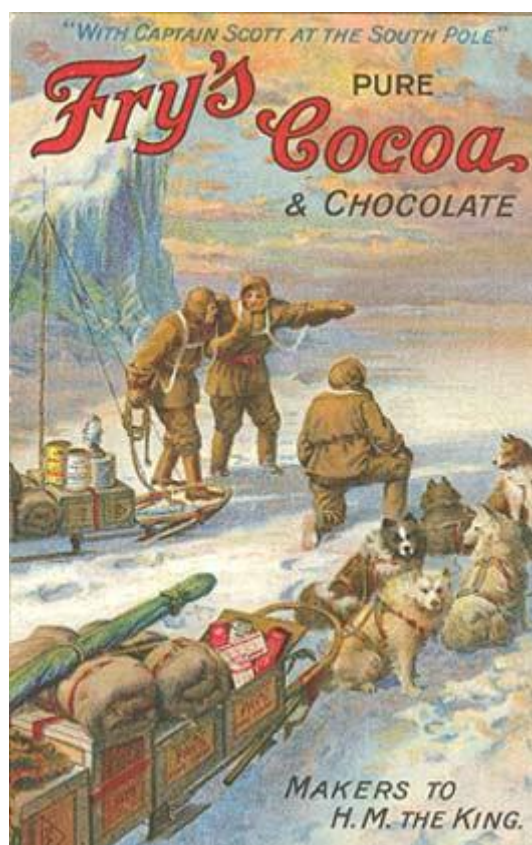
Why?

Because he took it to the snows of Norway and actually tried it on his snow sledges before he would trust himself to use it in the unknown Antarctic region.

You see, therefore, however cold, "SHELL" is reliable.

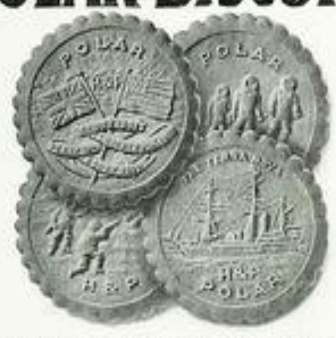
Its perfect purity—
that's the point!!

#10218609



HUNTLEY & PALMERS

POLAR BISCUITS



H. & P. "Polar" Biscuits (of which four out of eight varieties are here shown) were specially designed to commemorate the British Expedition to the Antarctic, and were taken, with many other of Huntley and Palmers Specialties, by Captain Scott on board the "Terra Nova."

"Polar" Biscuits bear cleverly modelled representations of appropriate subjects, and whilst they are of particular interest to children, these biscuits by virtue of their pleasant taste and general excellence, will appeal to all who try them.

ABOUT 48 BISCUITS TO THE POUND

In the collection it may be interesting to record that Huntley & Palmers' Biscuits were also supplied to Captain Scott's expedition.

HUNTLEY & PALMERS LTD. READING & LONDON

⁸⁴ Collections of Antarctic ephemera are contained in the archives of The Scott Polar Research Institute (<http://www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/catalogue/antc/browse>) and the National Library of Scotland (<http://www.nls.uk/collections/foreign/mountains/polar-ephemera>).

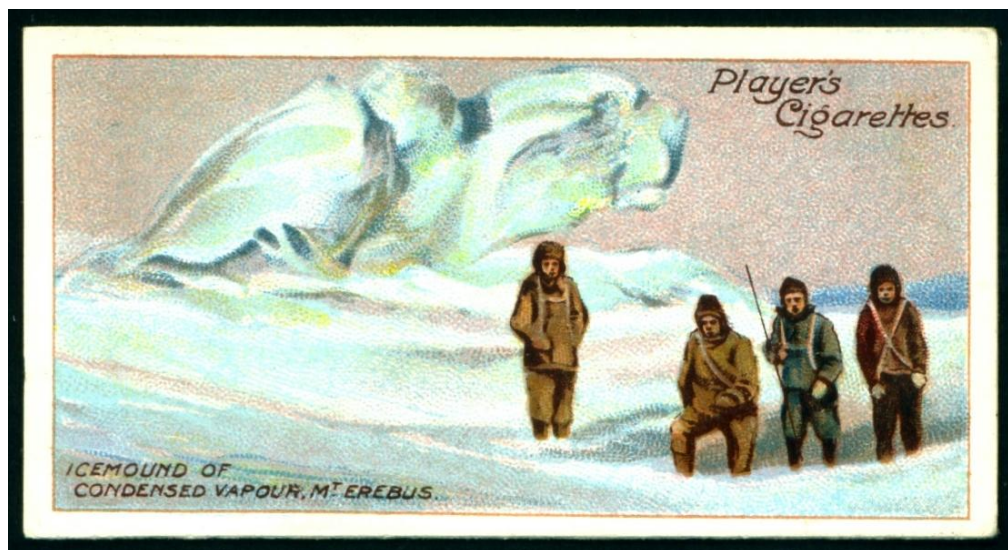


Fig. 34, 35, 36, 37, 38: Examples of Polar Ephemera

As the most distant and pitiless of geographical spaces, the South Polar Regions represented the ultimate test of personal strength. For this reason, the concept of heroic exploration found its apotheosis in the majestic figure of the Antarctic explorer. In what Fergus Fleming has described as “an increasingly humdrum industrial world”,⁸⁵ for young men the polar quest represented a noble undertaking which was truly “a measure of one’s spiritual and physical worth”.⁸⁶ The same isolated realms which were considered unworthy

⁸⁵ Fergus Fleming, Introduction to Ernest Shackleton, *South: The Endurance Expedition* (London: Penguin, 2015), p x.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

of further investigation in the early 1840s had become central to the dreams and aspirations of an entire generation of prospective national heroes by the start of the following century. The sudden and enormous allure of journeying to the South Pole even impressed an Antarctic veteran like Shackleton. In *South* he relates that when he put out a call for volunteers to accompany him on his cross-continental expedition in January 1914 he was surprised to receive “a flood of applications from all classes of the community to join the adventure”.⁸⁷ In the end, Shackleton wrote that he had to choose 56 men from “nearly five thousand applications”.⁸⁸

Just as other individuals had attempted to find immortality by exploring the remotest corners of Africa, Asia, South America, Canada, and Greenland, penetrating the most inhospitable region on the globe was now accepted as a feat of the same order of magnitude. This was certainly how Scott envisaged his leadership of the ‘Terra Nova’ expedition. In the ‘Message to the Public’ he wrote after his second mission disastrously unravelled, he maintained that his own impending death and that of four of his companions should not overshadow the exceptional nature of what they had done. Describing their horrendous trek back from the Pole, he stated “I do not think human beings ever came through such a month as we have come through”.⁸⁹ He wrote that “for my own sake I do not regret this journey”,⁹⁰ since it had proven “that Englishmen can endure hardships, help one another, and meet death with as great a fortitude as ever in the past”.⁹¹ The quote from Alfred Tennyson’s ‘Ulysses’ emblazoned on Scott’s memorial cross at Hut Point could as easily have been the motto of the entire Heroic Age: “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to

⁸⁷ Ernest Shackleton, *The Heart of the Antarctic: The Farthest South Expedition 1907-1909 and South: The Endurance Expedition*, ed. by Beau Riffenburgh (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2007), p 393.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Journals: Captain Scott’s Last Expedition*, p 421.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

yield”.⁹² In a period haunted by the spectre of degeneration, it was Scott’s belief that their sacrifice had not been in vain and would not be forgotten. As he correctly predicted, their legacy was a tale of “hardihood, endurance, and courage”⁹³ capable of stirring “the heart of every Englishman”.⁹⁴

Indeed, the absolute centrality of individual exploration narratives in the development of the Heroic Age cannot be overestimated. The historian of Antarctic literature Fauno Lancaster Cordes has suggested⁹⁵ that as much as this new era commenced with the far southern voyages of the late 1890s, it can equally be argued that the Heroic Age began with the publication of Frederick A. Cook’s *Through the First Antarctic Night: 1898-1899*, the first widely popular Antarctic travel memoir. An American physician who was ship’s doctor on the Belgian Antarctic Expedition of 1897-1899, Cook’s lucid record of “scientific exploration along the edge of the unknown”⁹⁶ and the mapping of “five hundred miles of land which had never before been seen by human eyes”⁹⁷ brought the subject of far southern discovery to the notice of a much wider proportion of the reading public. Furthermore, Cook’s gripping and frequently horrifying account of being one of the first survivors of “the ordeal of the long [A]ntarctic night”,⁹⁸ and his descriptions of “new human experience in a new, inhuman world of ice”,⁹⁹ presented polar exploration as a personal adventure in a way no traveller’s had before.

Therefore, in the Heroic Age far southern exploration transformed into a grand narrative about the historical destinies of different nations, and a validation of man’s dominant position on the earth. The British public’s enormous excitement about the idea of

⁹² Ibid, p 456.

⁹³ Ibid, p 421.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Fauno Lancaster Cordes, “‘Tekeli-li’ or Hollow Earth Lives’: A Bibliography of Antarctic Fiction (<http://www.antarctic-circle.org/fauno.htm>).

⁹⁶ Frederick A. Cook, *Through the First Antarctic Night: 1898-1899* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1980), p xv.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p xi.

⁹⁸ Ibid, p xv.

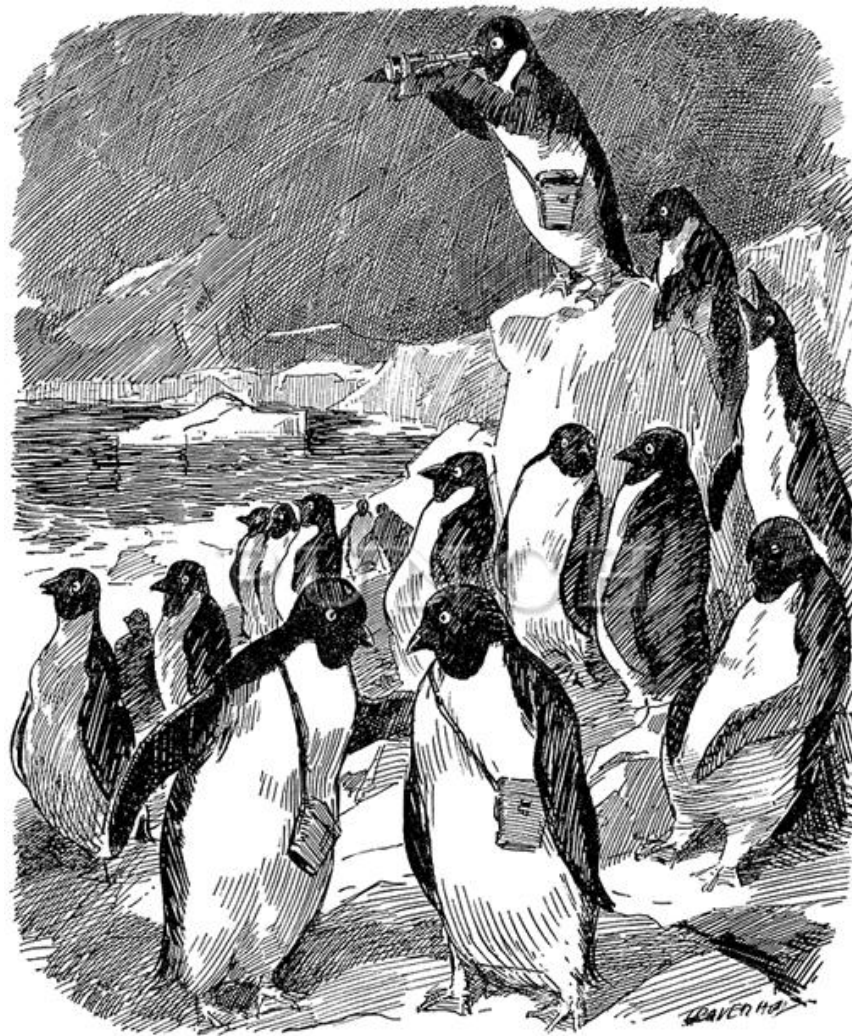
⁹⁹ Ibid.

a thrilling international race to the mysterious centre of the Antarctic was captured in a *Punch* cartoon entitled ‘The Start for the Pole’. [Fig 39] This depicted penguins kitted out with binoculars and telescopes like spectators at a race-track, keen to observe Scott’s glorious arrival at the polar finishing line. Early on it was generally assumed that Britain would swiftly and decisively make any lands which existed at the extreme south a part of its dominions. As Spufford has observed, even “the cold zones stretching into guesswork at the very edge of the imperial map”¹⁰⁰ were still considered “susceptible to the claims of possession”.¹⁰¹ The nation which had already been the first to locate the North Magnetic Pole and had led the way in Antarctic exploration, Britain now regarded itself as having something of a natural right to claim the geographic South Pole. This nationalistic attitude proved to be an enduring one, and was most succinctly expressed by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who wrote that “There is one Pole left, and that should be our Pole”,¹⁰² when calling upon the British government to allow Scott to make his second attempt to reach it.

¹⁰⁰ *I May Be Some Time*, p 250.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Quoted in Larson, *An Empire of Ice*, p166.



THE START FOR THE POLE.

THE ANTARCTICS. "GREAT SCOTT, THEY'RE OFF!"

[The Terra Nova is announced to sail from London on the South Polar Expedition on June 1.]

Fig. 39: 'The Start for the Pole', *Punch*, March 1911

Indeed, as both an energetic product of Victorian society and an aspiring Gothic storyteller, Conan Doyle is a demonstrative case-study in determining what the Poles signified for this generation of ambitious imperials. Conan Doyle was only twenty-one, and had yet to even graduate in medicine, when he obtained a position as a doctor on a Greenland whaling ship, the 'Hope' of Peterhead, in 1880. He eventually spent two six month seasons aboard this vessel, and for much of this time the 'Hope' cruised among the endless Arctic icefields, where he was much impressed by the constant sensation of being

“on the very brink of the unknown”.¹⁰³ Hoping to follow the example of one of his literary heroes, Edgar Allan Poe (whom he described as “the supreme original short story writer of all time”¹⁰⁴), Conan Doyle looked to the frozen sea for inspiration and began work on a lost story entitled ‘A Journey to the Pole’. The year after his return he published a Gothic tale of polar mystery and obsession, ‘The Captain of the ‘Pole-Star’,’ one of his first major successes as an author.¹⁰⁵

Conan Doyle later described his months in the faraway Arctic as “a strange and fascinating chapter of my life”,¹⁰⁶ and one which had awakened him to the exciting possibility of lands “which the maps know not”.¹⁰⁷ In December 1883 Conan Doyle delivered a lecture to the Portsmouth Literary and Scientific Society entitled ‘The Arctic Seas’, and a newspaper account of this focused on his argument that of all the unexplored territories on the globe which continued to represent “an opprobrium to science and a challenge to human daring”¹⁰⁸ the Polar Regions were without equal. While he devoted most of his lecture to outlining what he considered as the best way to reach the North Pole, like that of the world at large Conan Doyle’s imagination was also turning south. Whatever spaces remained uncharted in the Arctic, he noted that these paled in comparison to “the great mysterious continent of the South”¹⁰⁹ which still “shrouded itself behind a veil of ice”.¹¹⁰ As the newspaper report observed, Conan Doyle now confidently predicted that between them the Polar Regions would inspire “indomitable pluck, wonderful self-

¹⁰³ Arthur Conan Doyle, “*Dangerous Work*”: *Diary of an Arctic Adventure*, ed. John Lellenberg and Daniel Stashower (London: The British Library, 2012), p 15.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p 2.

¹⁰⁵ See Darryl Jones ed, Arthur Conan Doyle, *Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p 15.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p 308.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p 307.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*.

abnegation, and devotion”,¹¹¹ and become “a training-school for all that was high and godlike in man”.¹¹²

When, in February 1913, the news finally reached civilization that almost a year earlier Captain Scott had not only been conclusively beaten to his objective by his Norwegian rival Amundsen, but had perished while marching back from the Pole, the narrative of heroic exploration reconfigured itself once again. The British public responded with an enormous outpouring of grief and Scott was mourned across the globe as the foremost explorer and leader of men of his generation, a heroic myth which would remain intact for another sixty years. Even at the time, the hyperbolic rhetoric of heroic imperial discourse meant that it was not always easy to distinguish fact from fiction. Indeed, when Scott’s account first appeared in print in *The Strand*,¹¹³ the story of his fatal assault on the Pole was presented in a manner which was fundamentally no different to that of the latest adventures of Conan-Doyle’s great eccentrics Sherlock Holmes and Professor Challenger, serialized in the same issues.¹¹⁴

Searching desperately for an explanation as to how the polar prize had been lost, the British press laid the blame for the disastrous result of Scott’s second expedition not on any human weakness or failing but on the insidious nature of the Antarctic itself. Meticulous though Scott’s preparations had been, the nation was informed that he had finally been overcome by the “extraordinary difficulties”,¹¹⁵ “exceptionally severe”¹¹⁶ weather, and the “horribly arduous conditions”¹¹⁷ found on the polar plateau. In May 1913 the RGS posthumously presented Scott and his closest friend Dr. Edward Wilson with

¹¹¹ Ibid, p 308.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ In a series of articles entitled ‘To the South Pole: Captain Scott’s Own Story, Told from His Journals’, from June to September 1913.

¹¹⁴ Conan Doyle’s story ‘The Dying Detective’ and instalments of his novel *The Poison Belt* appeared alongside the series of articles on Scott.

¹¹⁵ ‘Captain Scott’s Expedition’, *The Times*, April 2nd 1912, p 9.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

special awards. In the words of its new president, Lord Curzon, the two men had been part of a magnificent enterprise unlike anything seen “since the days of the Tudors”,¹¹⁸ and he boasted that “no more brilliant feat had been accomplished in the history of Arctic or Antarctic exploration”.¹¹⁹ Concerning the cause of their tragic fates, Curzon argued that while the wily Amundsen, the “lucky winner”¹²⁰ of the polar race, had experienced “singular good fortune”¹²¹ the more diligent and principled Scott had been “beaten not by some isolated catastrophe, still less by want of forethought or provision on his own part, but by a combination of misfortunes”.¹²²

Curzon observed that it would console the British people to learn that Scott and his friends had been the victims of a doomed situation “in which every force of nature seemed to join hands with an almost malevolent fate in order to drive the party to destruction”.¹²³ Previous expedition had seen explorers survive “blizzards, glaciers, crevasses, abnormal temperatures, [and] accidents”,¹²⁴ but on the plateau he claimed that Scott had encountered conditions “unequalled in the history of Polar research”.¹²⁵ Unlike their Norwegian competitor, he and the other members of the polar party had beheld the Antarctic’s true monstrosity, and as a result they were now “lying in the frozen clutch of death in the Great Ice Barrier”.¹²⁶ Within weeks, the photograph showing Scott’s “death-place”,¹²⁷ a small tent, half-buried “in a desolate waste of deep and levelled snow”,¹²⁸ [Fig. 40] had been reproduced in every major newspaper in the world. In this manner, a narrative which began as a celebration of the bravery and resilience of Britain’s explorers had concluded with a

¹¹⁸ ‘Polar Exploration: Lord Curzon on the Scott Expedition’, *The Times*, May 27th 1913, p 5.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ ‘The Tent in which Captain Scott Died’, illustrated in *The Times*, May 21st, 1913, p 7.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

sinister, Gothic image of how they had been engulfed by this pitiless white realm. The site of what had been expected to be Scott's victory had instead become what the *Strand* termed "The Ice-Grave of the Heroes".¹²⁹

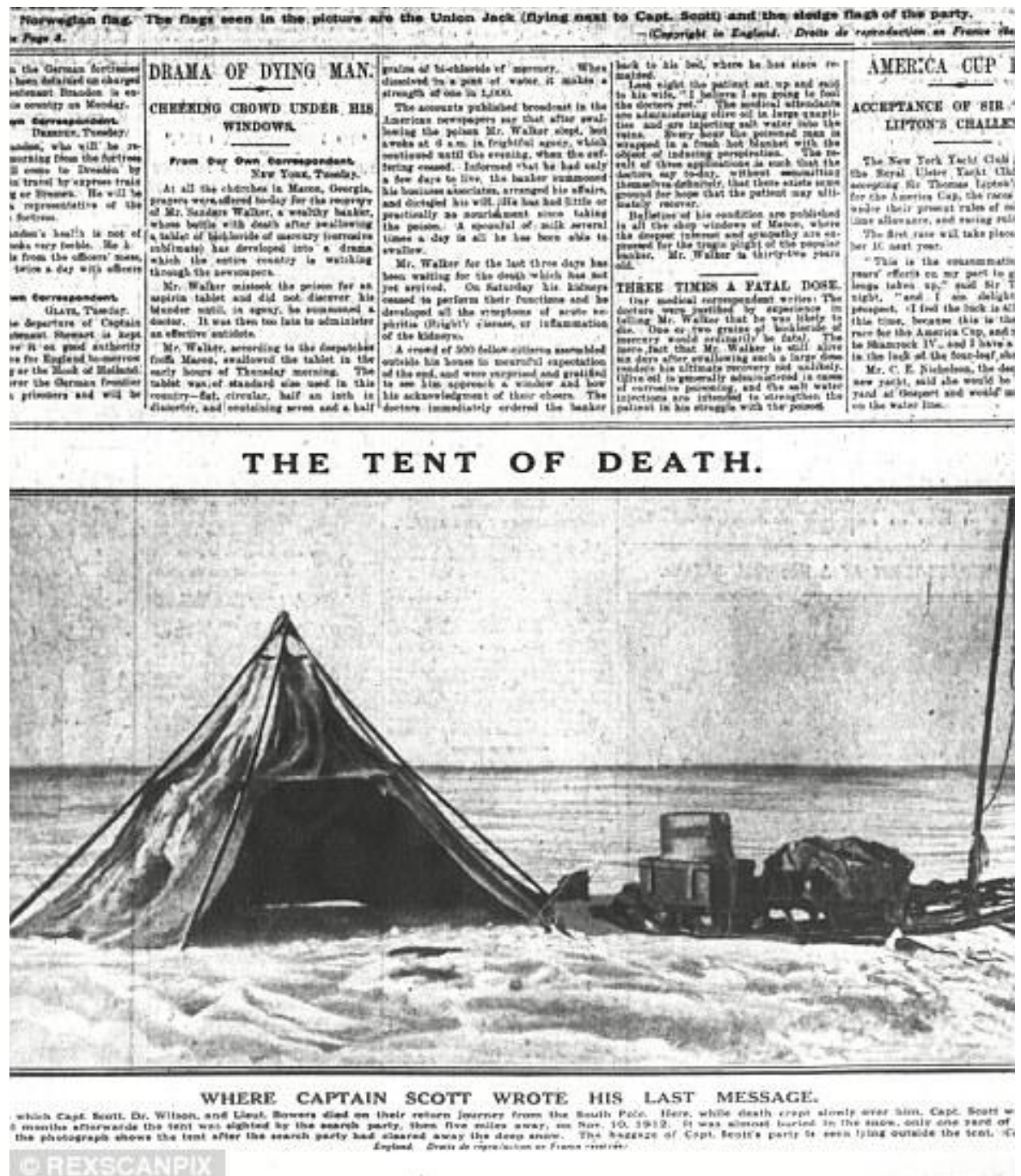


Fig. 40: The Tent of Death', *The Daily Mail*, 11th February 1913

¹²⁹ 'To the South Pole: Captain Scott's Own Story, Told from His Journals, Part IV' *The Strand Magazine*, September 1913, p 364.

Section 2: “Is this the South Pole? Is this the Earth, or are We in a Nightmare on Some Other Planet?”:¹³⁰ John Martin Leahy’s ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’

‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ was originally published in the January 1928 issue of *Weird Tales*, the magazine which became synonymous with the fiction of H.P. Lovecraft and which famously rejected *At the Mountains of Madness* three years later. Usually regarded as a self-contained work, the story was in fact Leahy’s belated coda to *The Living Death*, a short novel about an Antarctic expedition which he published in 1925. Although it contains many strange features, such as giant, carnivorous plants, grotesque creatures which are part human and part bear, and a mysterious woman kept in suspended animation in a block of ice, thematically *The Living Death* more closely resembles the colourful lost-civilization fantasies of contemporary popular authors like Edgar Rice Burroughs. By contrast, ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ is a Gothic horror story which derives considerable power from the convincing realism of its depiction of the Antarctic.

As this analysis will reveal, in comparison to the pure fantasy of *The Living Death* this story clearly demonstrates Leahy’s close familiarity with actual exploration accounts. Written towards the end of the hiatus between the first and second phase of the Heroic Age, the tale focuses on the closing stages of the ‘polar race’ and interrogates the new mythology which had developed around the Antarctic by this period. In addition, much of its otherworldly horror emerges out of the perceptual ambiguities described by Scott, Shackleton and the others who were first to explore the continental interior. Like Poe and Verne before him, Leahy also exploits the shifting and indefinite nature of far southern experience both to imbue the Antarctic landscape with a sense of Gothic terror and also to destabilize the text itself, so that it continually prevents the reader from constructing an

¹³⁰ John Martin Leahy, ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ in Bill Manhire ed., *The Wide White Page: Writers Imagine Antarctica* (Victoria: Victoria University Press, 2004), p 123.

entirely coherent interpretation. The techniques he uses to create this baffling uncertainty shall be discussed later in this section.

Before examining Leahy's tale, it is important to focus once again on the discursive upheaval concerning the South Polar Regions which resulted in the first phase of the Heroic Age. In *The Voyage of the Discovery* (1905), Robert Falcon Scott charts the historical developments which culminated in his initial Antarctic voyage. He writes that after showing little or no interest in the far south for almost sixty years, by the turn of the century it seemed as though the international scientific community had collectively awoken to the fact "that continental land must exist within the Antarctic Circle".¹³¹ He observes that all at once science regained its prior sense of curiosity about the vast sections of these territories which still remained "utterly unknown to man".¹³² Then, within a relatively brief period, the plans for "an attack upon that great ice-bound region",¹³³ which a short time earlier could not "have looked more hopeless",¹³⁴ were being drawn up by a number of governments, and an age-old dream of polar conquest was fast becoming a reality.

Ernest Shackleton, who joined Scott's 'Discovery' expedition for his first experience of the far south, was also conscious of how the perception of these regions had been revolutionised by the start of the Edwardian era. In *The Heart of the Antarctic* (1909), he notes the rapidity with which the implications of this transformation became clear. No longer just a theoretical space, Shackleton observes that it was now widely recognised that these distant Antarctic realms amounted to "an unlimited field for research".¹³⁵ An awesome geographical domain whose details had only begun to be recorded, he writes that

¹³¹ Robert Falcon Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2009), p 29.

¹³² *Ibid*, p 19.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p 26.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*.

¹³⁵ *The Heart of the Antarctic*, p 10.

the “great store of information”¹³⁶ brought back by the ‘Discovery’ was merely a starting point. The study of the “Aurora Australis, atmospheric electricity, tidal movements, hydrography, currents of the air, ice formations and movements, biology and geology”¹³⁷ were just some of the many things which Shackleton correctly predicted would flourish as mystery turned to wonder and further expeditions went south.

In this period, the very existence of Antarctica, the fact that this vast space completely removed from civilization remained entirely untamed, became the rationale for further exploration. The far south’s absolute remoteness and elusiveness were the very factors which, in the words of Stephanie Barczewski, made it “an irresistible lure”¹³⁸ for ambitious young adventurers. Larson has estimated that by the start of the Edwardian era, the entirety of the territory which had been precisely charted amounted to “less than one-tenth of the actual coast and none of the interior”¹³⁹ of the continent. In this way, the attempt to reach a full understanding of the South Polar Regions was one of the most formidable early challenges for twentieth century science. However, the first Heroic Age expedition only reinforced the Gothic perception of the Antarctic as an overwhelmingly unnatural and malevolent realm. In August 1897 an exploratory vessel named the ‘Belgica’ was launched by the Belgian government. While attempting to reach the Antarctic Peninsula the following February it became frozen in field ice, leading to a long and protracted ordeal for its crew.

Chronicling their intense misery was Frederick Cook, an American who would later lay claim to being the first explorer to reach the North Pole in April 1908. As the sun set over the Antarctic on the 16th of May 1898, he wrote that “[T]he curtain of blackness which has fallen over the outer world of icy desolation has also descended upon the inner

¹³⁶ Ibid, p 9.

¹³⁷ Ibid, p 10.

¹³⁸ Stephanie L. Barczewski, *Antarctic Destinies: Scott, Shackleton, and the Changing Face of Heroism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p 12.

¹³⁹ *An Empire of Ice*, p 73.

world of our souls”.¹⁴⁰ Describing the pack ice and its “despondent surface of grey”,¹⁴¹ Cook detailed the devastating influence of its unbearable monotony. As the ship’s doctor, he conceded that he had been unprepared for the psychological effects of being trapped in this lightless environment, and of the interminable wait for the return of the summer. While Cook considered the Arctic as having “some redeeming features”,¹⁴² he could “think of nothing more disheartening, more destructive to human energy, than this dense, unbroken blackness of the long polar night”.¹⁴³ When the “life-giving rays of the sun are withdrawn”¹⁴⁴ Cook observed that “the night soaks hourly a little more colour from our blood”.¹⁴⁵ He noted that the hair of almost every man aboard had gone “decidedly grey within two months, though few are over thirty”,¹⁴⁶ and all of them had “aged ten years”.¹⁴⁷

The ‘Belgica’ was marooned in the Bellingshausen Sea for thirteen months, during which time most of the crew came close to death from polar anaemia, two were killed in accidents, and two went insane from the perpetual “soul-despairing darkness”.¹⁴⁸ In spite of this dreadful experience, the ship’s first mate optimistically reported that the Antarctic ice had now been “tried and examined, and observations have been made which may prove of invaluable service to future expeditions”,¹⁴⁹ and he vowed that he would return there: his name was Roald Amundsen, the man who would later claim the South Pole. For all his steely precision and the comparative ease with which he attained his goal, this section shall presently examine how Leahy uses the dreadful fallout from Amundsen’s expedition as one of the themes of his tale, proving that even after the Pole had been won the Antarctic’s Gothic potential was far from exhausted.

¹⁴⁰ *Through the First Antarctic Night*, p 282.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p 294.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, p 295.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p 316.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p 319.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p 301.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p 295.

¹⁴⁹ Roald Amundsen ‘The Navigation of the Antarctic Ice-Pack’ in *Through the First Antarctic Night*, p 452.

The ‘Belgica’ expedition was far from unique in representing the extreme south in Gothic terms. As each of the early Heroic Age explorers returned, polar scientists built up an ever-more perplexing image of a region of nightmarish contradictions: an almost unfathomably vast desert encased in frozen water, a monumental icescape whose terrible featurelessness played havoc with perspective and disrupted traditional forms of representation, an environment which appeared timeless and static but which was secretly in a state of constant change and dramatic transformation, a hauntingly alien world which was home to many strange life-forms but also utterly hostile to human beings and could obliterate them without warning. Never before had science encountered such “an abomination of desolation”,¹⁵⁰ to use Francis Spufford’s term; after centuries of colonisation and the boundless expansion of civilization to the planet’s outer reaches, here was a space which effortlessly resisted the human desire for knowledge and mastery like no other had ever done.

This concept of the Antarctic interior as an irredeemably uncanny environment concealing something unthinkable terrible also underlies ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’. In Leahy’s Gothic tale the logic of exploration is inverted. The task of removing the strangeness of these unknown regions by making them part of the scientific order only brings its protagonists into contact with a madness-inducing Otherness. The outline of the plot is simple: In the frame narrative, an unnamed explorer relates the discovery of a tent concealing the remains of Robert Drumgold, a member of the Sutherland expedition which competed against Amundsen and Scott before vanishing on the Polar Plateau. Hideously, all that was left of Drumgold was his head which appears “to have been *chewed* from the trunk”,¹⁵¹ a dreadful “look of horror”,¹⁵² still etched “upon the frozen features”.¹⁵³ In the

¹⁵⁰ *I May Be Some Time*, p 1.

¹⁵¹ ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ p 115.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

same fashion that Scott's journals were found concealed beside his body, the only other thing in the tent apart from this "grisly remnant of mortality"¹⁵⁴ was Drumgold's sledging diary. The narrator then confesses that this document only contains "a mystery as insoluble (if it were true) as the presence here of his severed head".¹⁵⁵

The story's main narrative, Drumgold's diary entries begin on the 3rd of January 1912, with the Sutherland expedition fifteen miles and one day's march from the Pole. He observes that they have enjoyed exceptionally fine conditions, and as he surveys the "plain never trod by human foot before"¹⁵⁶ on which their goal is located he is now confident of success. Then Drumgold's companion Travers discerns a dark object "rising above the blinding whiteness of the snow".¹⁵⁷ Temporarily unsure of what they are seeing, the polar party identify it as a tent and the devastating truth of the situation becomes apparent. "Forestalled",¹⁵⁸ the very same word used by Scott upon discovering that the Norwegians had located the Pole before him, is all that Sutherland can utter when he realises their entire effort has been in vain.

Approaching the tent, the polar party is perplexed by the "strange, inexplicable uneasiness"¹⁵⁹ of their dogs, which seem to be imploring them to keep their distance. Unperturbed, Drumgold, Travers and Sutherland clear the snow and ice from the flimsy structure of "drab-coloured gabardine".¹⁶⁰ They confirm that the tent (which Scott described as "a small compact affair supported by a single bamboo"¹⁶¹ [Fig. 41]) was erected by the triumphant Amundsen, before noticing that it is bulging inexplicably on one side. Wondering if the Norwegian explorers might be dead inside, Sutherland enters it. What he sees sends him berserk, and he warns the others not to do the same "unless you

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p 114.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p 115.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p 118.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p 120.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ *Journals: Captain Scott's Last Expedition*, p 377.

are prepared to welcome madness, or worse”.¹⁶² Travers ignores him, but when Drumgold asks him what lies within he answers with “a groan horrible beyond all words of man”.¹⁶³ In only a matter of minutes, Drumgold realises he has become trapped at this “cursed spot”¹⁶⁴ with “a couple of madmen”.¹⁶⁵



Fig. 41: Captain Scott and the members of the Polar Party with Amundsen’s tent on the Polar Plateau, 18th January 1912

Unable to comprehend how something could “wreck, virtually instantaneously, the strong brains of two strong men”,¹⁶⁶ Drumgold’s first instinct is also to look inside and see “[w]hat unimaginable horror was there behind that thin wall of gabardine”,¹⁶⁷ but

¹⁶² ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’, p 123.

¹⁶³ p 124.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p 126.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p 127.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Sutherland and Travers restrain him. He presses them for answers, and both men agree that whatever is inside the tent “can’t belong to earth”¹⁶⁸ and was “never born on this planet of ours”.¹⁶⁹ Drumgold is convinced that these are the ravings of lunatics, but when Travers empties a rifle into the tent it emits “a low and throbbing – a sound that no man ever heard on this earth – one that I hope no man will ever hear again”.¹⁷⁰ It begins to move unnaturally, and the three explorers decide they must “get back to the world of men with our fearful message”.¹⁷¹

The tale concludes with Drumgold’s last entries. In these, he grows ever more certain that something “not of this earth”¹⁷² has indeed followed the expedition from the “tent of horror”.¹⁷³ As the only one who has not set eyes on it, he writes that he must evade it long enough to “somehow get our story to the world”.¹⁷⁴ Drumgold then records the disappearances of Travers and Sutherland, while he hears only a “horrible hellish sound”¹⁷⁵ and catches fleeting impressions of “something moving”.¹⁷⁶ Alone in his tent and certain that the thing is closing in on him, Drumgold writes that in his diary’s “hastily scrawled pages is recoded an experience that, I believe, is not surpassed by the wildest to be found in the pages of the most imaginative romanticist”,¹⁷⁷ but he warns that if his account only receives the “mockery of the world’s unbelief”,¹⁷⁸ then the entire human race is doomed.

At first glance, ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ appears to be a conventional alien invasion narrative, with an added measure of ghoulish horror. After all, the one thing the members of the Sutherland expedition agree upon is that the entity they have encountered is an

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p 124.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p 125.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p 128.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p 129.

¹⁷² Ibid, p 130.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p 129.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p 131.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, p 130.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p 129.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

extraterrestrial, an entity which might be from “Venus or Mars or Sirius or Algol, or hell itself”,¹⁷⁹ but which cannot have originated on earth. However, by placing the tale in its Heroic Age context, numerous other readings become possible. Elizabeth Leane has argued that when the story is assessed in relation to the events of 1912, the monstrosity can be viewed as a striking metaphor for “the terrible disappointment of Scott’s party on realizing that they were not first to the Pole”.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, the Norwegians had claimed this honour almost a month before Leahy’s fictitious expedition reaches the same location. Since it was Amundsen’s tent which signalled defeat for Scott and his men, Leane views the indescribable enemy which stalks the explorers as a projection of their devastating awareness that what now awaited them was “failure, the long walk home and impending death from cold and starvation”.¹⁸¹ However, as well-founded as Leane’s interpretation is, this reading is only one of many which the narrative can be made to support.

When considered in light of the representation of the far southern landscape in the Heroic Age and its wider preoccupation with the bodies of Antarctic explorers and the boundaries of corporeal existence, the more subtle complexities of Leahy’s tale become apparent. The Gothic terror of ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ derives not just from its chilling evocation of the moment Scott’s expedition was undone, but also from its allusion to the tragic scenes which occurred later. On November 12th 1912 the twenty-six year old Apsley Cherry-Garrard was part of the search party which found the tent containing the corpses of Scott, Lieut. Henry Bowers and Dr. Edward Wilson on the Ross Ice Shelf. Cherry-Garrard had known for some time that the polar party had perished, but his diary records the terrible anguish which accompanied the unearthing of their icy tomb. “We have found them – to say it has been a ghastly day cannot express it – it is too bad for words”,¹⁸² he

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p 127.

¹⁸⁰ *Antarctica in Fiction*, p 70.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p 71.

¹⁸² *The Worst Journey in the World*, p 495/496.

wrote of the grim process of piecing together their last hours. Almost as if they might return to life, their perfectly preserved bodies were left amidst the ice.¹⁸³

In life Scott and his team had been admired for their bravery and dedication, but in death they came to be perceived as something more. Scott's fate gave the world a distinctly Gothic image of the ill-fated polar adventurer who, in confronting the manifold terrors of this white realm, had undergone a transformation. As Barczewski points out, he and the others were represented as the victims not of any ordinary circumstances but men who had died "a polar death, caused by the uniquely demanding conditions of the Antarctic environment",¹⁸⁴ something which only increased the public's curiosity about what had befallen them. In June 1913 an exhibition of what were described as the "Captain Scott Relics"¹⁸⁵ went on view at Earl's Court in London, and its focal point was the tent in which his frozen body was found. As mentioned in the previous section, it was the photograph of this tent which had accompanied the news of Scott's demise in the press. However, the symbolic act of removing it from Antarctica and putting it on display in Britain strengthened the idea that Scott's story had, in a sense, continued on beyond his final ordeal on the Ross Ice Shelf. Therefore, in assessing Leahy's tale it is important to consider the image of the tent as one which not only signified failure and oblivion but also transcendence, the endurance of the individual in another state of existence.

One of the reasons why the figure of the polar explorer became identified as this kind of noble victim or heroic martyr was due to a set of pseudoscientific attitudes, which became prominent at the same time as the revival of interest in the Antarctic. As noted in section one, in response to the entirely materialistic model of creation advanced by Darwinian evolution, Edwardian theorists like Sir Oliver Lodge and Frederick W.H. Myers

¹⁸³ According to Manhire, the bodies of the Polar Party are currently located twenty-eight metres below the surface of the Ross Ice Shelf, *The Wide White Page*, p21.

¹⁸⁴ *Antarctic Destinies*, p 148.

¹⁸⁵ 'Captain Scott's Relics: Exhibition At Earl's Court', *The Times*, June 27th 1913, p 77.

undertook the search for an alternative metaphysical system capable of explaining the sources of human thought and action and the relationship between man and the universe. Spufford has written that for such thinkers the obvious conclusion was that “where living creatures were concerned a special force must be active”.¹⁸⁶ This ‘life-force’ was of prime importance in their new scheme of things, since they envisaged it as having the potential to directly shape the physical world.

The speculations of figures like Lodge and Myers led them to the notion that this natural energy was visibly manifest in human actions. Since individuals were supposedly animated by different amounts of this force, it followed that those who possessed enough of it were capable of anything. Consequently, it is possible to perceive the Heroic Age, with its emphasis on the tremendous deeds and virtually superhuman attributes of polar explorers, as a phenomenon which affirmed metaphysical doctrines of this kind. As Spufford observes, for many Edwardians “it no longer seemed certain that there was a physical limit on what bodies could be made to do”,¹⁸⁷ and some even regarded humans as having the capacity to “evolve voluntarily”.¹⁸⁸ By harnessing his innate motive force, man could reconfigure his world. Inevitably, this raised the question of whether human beings might not be able to reconfigure themselves and leave their bodies behind altogether.

As a result of these metaphysical ideas, the image of the lifeless but uncorrupted bodies of Scott and his companions inside their tent may have represented the vestiges of a metamorphosis, the survival of the person beyond their corporeal shell. In perishing on the way back from the South Pole, Scott had paradoxically verified the Edwardian belief that nothing was beyond human power. The deaths of the polar party meant that they did not just become martyrs to science but the very archetypes of human beings who had gloriously realised their full potential. Max Jones has written that, to the Edwardian mind,

¹⁸⁶ *I May Be Some Time*, p 270.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p 271.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

the fate of Scott and his men “marked a triumph over materialism”.¹⁸⁹ The popularity of this view is clear from the Gothic image which adorned the cover of a special issue of the British weekly *The Sphere*.¹⁹⁰ [Fig. 42] This depicted Scott, his enervated body lying half-buried in snow, looking up in awe at a phantasmagoric winged figure hovering in the darkness of the polar night. The symbolic message of the image is obvious: having risen to the challenge of this terrible land, these Antarctic explorers had in some sense surpassed the limits of mere physical existence.

¹⁸⁹ Max Jones, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p 164.

¹⁹⁰ *The Sphere*, May 1913.



Fig. 42: Cover Illustration by Fortunio Matania for *The Sphere*, 24th May 1913

These same questions of what the Heroic Age had proven and where human evolution might lead are central to the Gothic uncertainty which haunts Leahy's tale. As

Drumgold treks towards the Pole, he contemplates whether the corporeal stage of human development is approaching its end. If this “god-like spirit in the body of a quasi-ape”¹⁹¹ can survive amidst the Antarctic’s “desolation of snow and ice”,¹⁹² he wonders if it is not also possible that one day human beings will cease to be biological creatures and explore the stars in another form. In support of his idea, Drumgold quotes from an authentic work entitled *World-Life; or, Comparative Geology* (1883) by the controversial American geologist and zoologist Alexander Winchell, who, like Lodge and Myers in Britain, held that human existence was not bound to the material plane and that an upheaval in evolutionary conditions could see mankind transform into ethereal beings. In Winchell’s words, a rational mind was not dependent on “warm blood”¹⁹³ and physical bodies were “merely the local fitting of intelligence to particular modifications of universal matter and force”.¹⁹⁴

Indeed, Drumgold’s time in the South Polar Regions has not only convinced him that life can exist independently of the body. Before he and the others stumble upon Amundsen’s tent, he has come to believe that they are surrounded by “nameless entities, disembodied, *watching* things”.¹⁹⁵ These speculations also connect ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ to one of the most famous episodes of the uncanny in the history of Antarctic exploration. In the spring of 1916, a team led by Shackleton set out to get assistance in rescuing the other members of the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition left stranded on the ice-covered Elephant Island, north of the Antarctic Peninsula. Shackleton faced many daunting obstacles on this journey, but none greater than “that long and racking march of thirty-six hours over the unnamed mountains and glaciers of South Georgia”,¹⁹⁶ a bleak island in the

¹⁹¹ ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’, p 116.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid, p 117.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ *South: The Endurance Expedition*, p 591.

southern Atlantic Ocean. In a day and a half, he, Frank Worsley, and Tom Crean trekked across twenty-two miles of South Georgia's unexplored interior, often in total darkness, before reaching a whaling station on its northern coast.

In *South*, Shackleton wrote that only later did the three men discover that while traversing these uncharted summits and snowfields each had felt "we were four, not three"¹⁹⁷ and that "there was another person with us". Shackleton explained that this comforting presence was "a subject very near to our hearts",¹⁹⁸ but he considered his literary talents inadequate to the task of "trying to describe things intangible".¹⁹⁹ Instead, he turned to the words of John Keats ("O dearth of human words! roughness of mortal speech"²⁰⁰) to convey his sense of being followed by this unseen 'fourth traveller'.²⁰¹ However, the benevolent companion of *South* is portrayed very differently in Leahy's tale. As he draws nearer to the Pole, Drumgold writes of his secret terror that "this frightful place knows the presence of beings other than ourselves and our dogs – things which we cannot see but which are watching us".²⁰² By the time they find Amundsen's tent, he has grown certain that the sinister, non-corporeal inhabitants of this domain are something "more fearful than even the madness of the human brain ever has fashioned".²⁰³

If the desolate terrain of South Georgia inspired thoughts of a protective friend in Shackleton's mind, in Leahy's tale the terrible indifference of the Antarctic environment

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Quoted in Ibid.

²⁰¹ Leahy was not alone in finding literary inspiration in Shackleton's account of an unseen presence following him across the polar desolation. T.S. Eliot incorporates this image from this episode of his memoir in the fifth section of his epic Modernist work *The Waste Land*, but he converts Shackleton's imagined fourth figure into a third figure (Who is the third who walks always beside you?/When I count, there are only you and I together/But when I look ahead up the white road/There is always another one walking beside you/Gliding wrapt in a brown mantle, hooded/I do not know whether a man or a woman/ - But who is that on the other side of you?) See T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, in *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), p 59-76. For more on Eliot's appropriation from Shackleton's account and the influence of Antarctic exploration narratives on the Modernist movement in general, see Mark Rawlinson, "Waste Dominion," 'White Warfare,' and Antarctic Modernism,' *Tate Papers*, No. 14, Autumn 2010 (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2010)

²⁰² 'In Amundsen's Tent', p 117.

²⁰³ Ibid.

generates a predatory, phantasmal force. Therefore, while Leane reads the horror in Amundsen's tent as a manifestation of the crushing realisation of failure, it can also be interpreted as a monstrous abstraction of the "monotonous uniformity"²⁰⁴ of the polar landscape itself, the concept of it as an oppressive, featureless void from which there is no escape. Just as Shackleton, and his men felt compelled to keep their sense of the 'fourth traveller' private, Drumgold admits that if his companions were "to read what I have set down here, they would think that I was losing my senses or would declare me already insane".²⁰⁵ In this way, Leahy's Gothic technique involves the introduction of an element of destabilizing ambiguity into the text by indicating that Drumgold's Antarctic ordeal may have already left him unhinged. After travelling for months in a disorientating physical space bereft of any variation, there is the suggestion that he has populated it with imaginary monsters.

At the same time, Drumgold's nebulous sense of reality is also closely linked with the deceitful mutability of human perceptions in the far south. Early on he acknowledges that although the Polar Plateau can assume the form of "a glorious fairyland",²⁰⁶ one must never be lulled into a false sense of security. While it seems a place of absolute emptiness and complete serenity, Drumgold reminds himself that this is a facade which conceals the appalling hostility of these regions. As he states, in this place "nothing stands between ourselves and a horrible death save the meagre supply of food on the sleds".²⁰⁷ The Sutherland expedition may have enjoyed unusually favourable conditions in its bid for the Pole, but Drumgold has secretly come to regard the plateau as somewhere "unutterably terrible to men"²⁰⁸ and "frightful beyond all words".²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p 118.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p 117.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, p 116.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

Drumgold's sense of the extreme south as a malignant and alien space mirrors the one which emerged from many Heroic Age accounts. Despite their stylistic idiosyncrasies, all of these exploration memoirs tended to depict the Antarctic itself as some great 'Other' standing in the way of progress. In these works, this deadening, sterile territory became an implacable enemy deploying a variety of cruel tricks to defy human supremacy and the omnipresent antagonist in what Shackleton called "the tale of the White Warfare of the South".²¹⁰ For all their sober pragmatism, Stephen J. Pyne has stated that the leading Heroic Age figures invariably presented their adventures as "a journey to Earth's underworld"²¹¹ or a revelation of "the dark side of existence".²¹² Surrounded by the seemingly limitless polar ice, they found that empirical data could be highly misleading and this made it impossible to obtain a definite impression of this white realm. As shall now be shown, in the minds of these explorers the Antarctic frequently resembled something insidious, a landscape of unreason where men could become hopelessly lost not just in a spatial sense but also a metaphysical one.

Vying to be the first to enter the unseen territories beyond the Antarctic's coastal fringe and reach the Pole, Scott and Shackleton's expeditions were fully equipped for every kind of challenge but they underestimated the deadly duplicity of the far south. Reflecting upon these optical illusions, Scott wrote that one of the more uncanny aspects of Antarctic exploration was adjusting to the reality of "how easily one could be deluded in respect to distance, and what extraordinarily false appearances distant objects would assume".²¹³ The longer he remained there, the more Scott came to understand that in spite of his immense research he had essentially entered "into an unknown world",²¹⁴ where "one must be exceedingly cautious in believing even what appears to be the evidence of one's

²¹⁰ *South: The Endurance Expedition*, p 389.

²¹¹ *The Ice*, p 175.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *The Voyage of the Discovery*, p 107.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 130.

own eyes”.²¹⁵ Among the chief lessons of his first expedition was the fact that this naturally deceptive environment could at any moment render his men “completely impotent”.²¹⁶ As he put it, he had been taught that the Antarctic was “the enemy”,²¹⁷ a powerful opponent he must never “undervalue”.²¹⁸

Returning to these regions later the same decade, Shackleton also found that the terrifying ambiguities of polar experience only contributed to the feeling that he and his men “were in some other world”,²¹⁹ a land of timeless mysteries. As a result of their distorted sense of perspective and their inability to determine if the landforms they could see were even real, Shackleton stated that when he led his expedition across “the highest plateau in the world”,²²⁰ in the last months of 1908 “[n]o man of us could tell what we would discover on our march south”²²¹ or “what wonders might not be revealed to us”.²²² As he attempted to reach the Pole, Shackleton wrote that “we have arrayed against us the strongest forces of nature”.²²³ In addition to “the difficulties of travelling over snow and ice in bad light”,²²⁴ there was also the disturbing fact that they could “trust nothing to eyesight, for the distances are so deceptive up here”.²²⁵ By the time Shackleton and his men set a new record for Farthest South on January 9th 1909, they were no longer able to judge the nature of their surroundings with any accuracy and could finally “see nothing but the dead white snow plain”.²²⁶

Therefore, from their early expeditions Scott and Shackleton learnt that venturing to the extreme south involved engaging in a form of metaphysics. Surviving there meant

²¹⁵ Ibid, p 107.

²¹⁶ Ibid, p 104.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ *The Heart of the Antarctic*, p 177.

²²⁰ Ibid, p 219.

²²¹ Ibid, p 184.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid, p 219.

²²⁴ Ibid, p 167.

²²⁵ Ibid, p 211.

²²⁶ Ibid, p 223.

doing without the basic certainties found anywhere else on earth, and allowing for a strange kind of cognition peculiar to the Antarctic realms. In Leahy's tale, the vagaries of these hallucinatory phenomena push Drumgold's mind to the brink of collapse, leading him to believe that he and his companions are being remorselessly hunted down by faceless polar forces. On the plateau he is struck by the unreality of their environment, writing that it seems as though the "place was a stage, our light the wrathful fire of the Antarctic sun, ourselves the actors in a scene stranger than any ever beheld in the mimic world".²²⁷ As if they have upset some mysterious balance by intruding there, Drumgold experiences an atmosphere of dread descend following the discovery of the tent and he becomes convinced that this "weird and terrible"²²⁸ place they are trapped in is the very "abode of utter desolation and of death".²²⁹

As Drumgold tries to maintain his sense of reality on the last stages of his Antarctic journey, like Poe and Verne's protagonists he is brought into collision with the limits of language. Just as Cherry-Garrard considered words insufficient to capture what he felt on entering the tent of his frozen comrades and Shackleton was unable to explain his sense of being followed by the 'fourth traveller', Drumgold similarly finds it impossible to articulate exactly what took place on the plateau. In the first extract from his diary he conjectures about the site of the Pole itself, and wonders if he and the others will find "[o]nly an unbroken expanse of white, or —",²³⁰ something he cannot name. Watching the terror of their dogs when they approach Amundsen's tent, he notes that fear is an "inadequate word"²³¹ to describe the reaction of the animals.

²²⁷ 'In Amundsen's Tent', p 122.

²²⁸ Ibid, p 119.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid, p 118.

²³¹ Ibid, p 120.

Later, Drumgold struggles to record how his companions went mad, but in his diary all he can ask himself is “how could I ever set that down?”²³² As he speculates about who or what they have disturbed in the tent, Drumgold’s ability to convey what he fears begins to fail as his sanity slips away. His entries become ever more brief, with puzzling gaps in between them. In the same manner that Shackleton could only write that the centre of Antarctica was somewhere “weird beyond description”,²³³ the uncanny presence (or “*thing* (if thing it was)”²³⁴) of Leahy’s tale is defined by a horrifying Otherness which cannot be characterised in human terms. Although Drumgold insists that he has set down everything that happened “to the best of my ability”,²³⁵ he is conscious that the living nightmare he is experiencing is something which defies expression as much as it precludes explanation.

However, like the entity Drumgold never quite sees, ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ offers half glimpses of a greater uncanny presence lurking at the margins of narrative, something which is also essential to its Gothic technique. If Drumgold has come to believe that the far south is populated by ghostly, disembodied beings, then Leahy characterises the Antarctic continent itself as one vast, ravenous and disturbingly corporeal organism. As the explorers flee from the tent they begin to imagine they are at the mercy “of something even more hellish”.²³⁶ The previously motionless landscape suddenly seems full of terrible life, and determined to gorge itself upon them. Therefore, by the end of the tale the far south has made its final transformation from a dead world into what Leane has described as “an engulfing, amorphous, threatening body that can literally swallow a hapless explorer”.²³⁷

This aspect of Leahy’s tale is highly reminiscent of some of the representations of the Antarctic interior which appeared following the loss of Scott’s party. In the wake of

²³² Ibid, p 118.

²³³ *The Heart of the Antarctic*, p 177.

²³⁴ ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’, p 111.

²³⁵ Ibid, p 129.

²³⁶ Ibid, p 131.

²³⁷ *Antarctica in Fiction*, p 54.

this tragedy, the *New York World* published an astonishing drawing very different from the majority of those which accompanied this tragedy, and which could as easily have been an illustration for a work of Gothic horror. This drawing, entitled 'The Goal' [Fig. 43] depicted a cowed and grinning spectre of death wringing its claws in the middle of a desolate polar landscape. Recalling Drumgold's severed head, the only visible trace of Scott and his comrades are their gleaming skulls. 'The Goal' was not the only image to represent the far south in this way. Another Gothic image, entitled 'In the Cause of Science', [Fig. 44] was published in a number of British newspapers at this time, and this cartoon depicted the polar party being devoured by a gigantic, gaping skull emerging from the ice. Only a short distance from this frozen hellmouth is the Pole, which bears a defiant Union Jack.

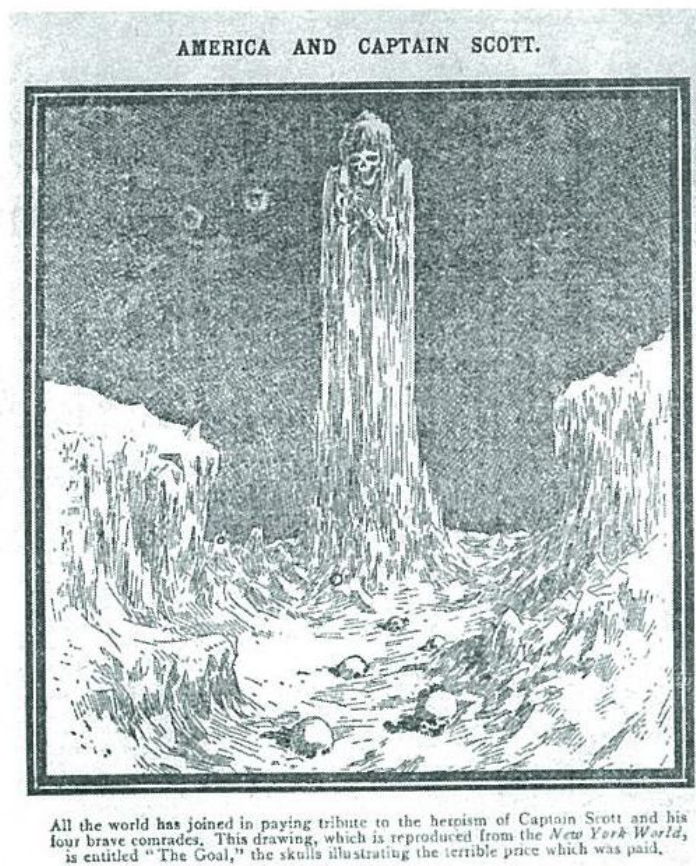


Fig. 43: Unknown Illustrator, 'The Goal', *New York World*, May 1913



Fig. 44: Illustrator unknown, ‘In the Cause of Science’, *The Daily Mail*, 29th May 1913

Just as these illustrations portrayed Scott’s polar party as having being literally consumed, ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ concludes with a similarly grotesque vision of the Antarctic landmass as an enormous entity which can absorb unfortunate trespassers. However, it is important to consider this concept of the Antarctic as a space with the capacity to undermine ordinary notions of corporeal integrity more closely. Revisiting the harrowing scene inside the tent in *The Worst Journey in the World*, Cherry-Garrard observed that although Scott and his comrades had been found in what resembled a state of gentle repose there was little doubt that they had suffered “a terrible time”²³⁸ due to the unspeakable conditions on the plateau. In Leahy’s story, the Sutherland expedition’s penetration of the unknown polar territories eventually destroys not only their minds but also their bodies.

The horrendous torments caused by frostbite were well documented by many Heroic Age explorers including Cherry-Garrard himself, and Leahy’s tale hideously exaggerates this idea of the Antarctic savagely gnawing away at the human body and consuming it one piece at a time. At the end of this process, what is left is not some great

²³⁸ *The Worst Journey in the World*, p 500.

martyr frozen for all time in a lair of ice but merely an abandoned piece of meat. In an environment offering no sources of nutrition and where explorers subsisted on starvation rations to reduce their weight load, it is unsurprising that the search party's first suspicion is that the Sutherland expedition descended into cannibalism, but even this "fearful explanation"²³⁹ is invalidated by the discovery of "a good supply of pemmican and biscuit".²⁴⁰

To bring this reading to a conclusion, in Leahy's tale doubt and confusion accumulate to point where there is no knowing if the events recorded in Drumgold's diary bear any relation to what actually befell the expedition. The reader can develop any number of plausible theories, but these can only ever remain conjecture: did the increasingly deranged Drumgold murder Travers and Sutherland and produce this bizarre story, only to be accidentally devoured by the ravenous dogs; were Travers and Sutherland forced to eat Drumgold and then fabricated these entries before perishing in a blizzard; did *all three* go insane as a result of their inability to face their failure and invent this story before their deaths to deflect attention away from what they had been unable to achieve? Leahy acknowledges the very indecipherability of the riddle he has constructed, as well as the Antarctic's ideal suitability as a location for such a Gothic narrative. As the frame narrator observes, the South Polar Regions are "certainly the most fearful area on this globe of ours",²⁴¹ and it is inevitable that by going there explorers will become ensnared in a situation "the mystery and horror of which perhaps surpass in gruesomeness what the most dreadful Gothic imagination ever conceived in its utterest abandonment to delirium and madness".²⁴²

²³⁹ 'In Amundsen's Tent', p 115.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid, p 112.

²⁴² Ibid, p 130.

As with the Antarctic Gothic works of Poe, Verne and Lovecraft analyzed in this thesis, ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ is another open text which can be perpetually reconstrued. In attempting to make sense of Drumgold’s narrative the reader is set at an impenetrable distance from the facts, much like the Sutherland expedition hopelessly isolated from the world and with no outside authority to appeal to in trying to fathom the terrifying phenomena which overwhelm them. In this way, Leahy characterises the Antarctic as a space which breeds its own variety of “sinister, nameless mystery”.²⁴³ It is a realm which possesses strange secrets of its own, but it is no more likely to reveal what these are than Drumgold’s severed head.

²⁴³ Ibid, p 129

Chapter Five:
“...The White, Aeon-Dead World of the Ultimate
South”:¹
At the Mountains of Madness by H.P. Lovecraft

¹ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘At the Mountains of Madness’ in Roger Luckhurst ed. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p 188.

Introduction

On the 21st of January 1902 Robert Falcon Scott recorded a curious episode in his journal. Six months into his first Antarctic expedition, and he and the crew of the ‘Discovery’ had tracked the edge of the Ross Ice Shelf into new and spectacular territories. Then, for a brief time, it appeared that Scott’s team had found something even more extraordinary. In *The Voyage of the Discovery* (1905), he recalled that this incident began with reports of strange wounds found on the bodies of numerous seals, suggesting that “a land animal might exist in these regions, though hitherto unseen by man”.² Scott was incredulous, but this changed when “we suddenly came on a floe covered with soft snow which bore the impress of footprints wide apart and bearing every appearance of having been made by a large land animal”.³ Before Scott knew what was happening “observers with cameras were soon over the side and breathlessly examining”⁴ what seemed to be the first evidence of a creature entirely new to science.

Speculation ran riot. What kind of huge animal could have produced such footprints; to what species did it belong; might it be an unknown survivor from the ancient past? It then emerged that the expedition had not made a zoological find to match its geographical discoveries, for the tracks were identified as those of a giant petrel. Nevertheless, for a tantalizing moment Scott and the others had believed that they were on the verge of encountering a native inhabitant of Antarctica which had remained completely unrecorded in the pages of natural history.

This episode may have ended in disappointment, but the very fact that the expedition’s biologists had even considered it possible that such a creature could exist amidst this ice-encased wasteland reveals much about contemporary scientific perspectives

² Robert Falcon Scott, *The Voyage of the Discovery* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2009) p 121.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

on the far south. The continental interior represented an almost incomprehensibly vast space, and there was simply no telling what might be found within this great white immensity. Ten days later Scott climbed to 800 feet in a balloon, becoming the first person to obtain an aerial view of inland Antarctica, and observed a series of enormous irregular shapes on the horizon quite unlike the continuous level plain he had expected. Below him was a small black dot, and he realised that this was the sledging party he had sent forward just before his ascent. Later, Scott wrote that as he watched it disappear into the distance he understood that the 'Discovery' expedition had truly passed "beyond the limits of the known".⁵

As Scott saw it, mankind's purpose in exploring the far south was twofold: in addition to mapping these frozen lands he recognised that science had a duty to "solve the mysteries of the vast new world"⁶ it was beginning to uncover. However, by 1928 he and the other key figures of the Heroic Age, Shackleton, and Amundsen, were dead. The task of continuing their work then fell to another nation, one which had not participated in this field in over eighty years. The Antarctic Expedition of 1928 saw the first team of American explorers travel to the far south since the U.S. Exploring Expedition in 1838. At its helm was Admiral Richard Evelyn Byrd, Jr. Having followed the progress of the Antarctic pathfinders since childhood, Byrd believed that the only way to honour those men who had opened "the eyes of the world to the possibilities of a well-organised, courageously prosecuted scientific inquiry into the Antarctic,"⁷ was to lead a new expedition which would throw light on the "appalling amount still unknown".⁸

Byrd eventually commanded five Antarctic missions, combining his interest in the scientific investigation of these regions with the other great passion of his life, aviation. In

⁵ Ibid, p 147.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Richard Evelyn Byrd, *Little America: Aerial Exploration in the Antarctic, The Flight to the South Pole* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1930), p 45.

⁸ Ibid.

1926 he had achieved international fame after making the first flight over the North Pole. Naturally, when he began to prepare his southern expedition, a history-making flight over the South Pole was integral to his plans. In this way, it was Byrd who restored to Antarctic exploration much of the excitement and romanticism which had been missing since the pioneers of the Heroic Age had made their celebrated attempts to reach the Pole. In the wretched, decade-long aftermath of the Great Depression, Byrd's morale-boosting exploits on the desolate polar surface and high above the clouds kept the nation enthralled.

Byrd wrote that his predecessors had managed to fix the continent's coastal limits, but within Antarctica's shores there still "lay hundreds of thousands of square miles of territory utterly unknown to geography",⁹ including most of the great plateau and the massive expanse between the Pole and the Weddell Sea. In this sense, he portrayed the Antarctic as the last space on Earth which offered untold "avenues for pure discovery".¹⁰ Like Scott before him, he maintained that this realm constituted "a vacuum abhorrent to scientist and cartographer alike".¹¹ As the nation which had established itself as the global centre of technological progress, Byrd stated that the time for America to strike south had arrived: it would have the glory of charting this unexplored world using all the "research equipment that modern invention has produced".¹²

Byrd's vision of what his nation could achieve in Antarctica extended even further. Just as the U.S. Exploring Expedition had claimed a sizable part of its coastline, Byrd made it clear that America was now in a position to take possession of its interior lands, which, in the words of Francis Spufford, amounted to "an unmapped space about the size of the continental United States".¹³ Although he claimed that knowledge was his only

⁹ Ibid, p 47.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Francis Spufford ed. *To the Ends of the Earth: An Anthology of the Finest Writing on the Arctic and Antarctic Vol. 2: The Antarctic* (London: Granta Books, 2007), p 4.

motivation, he planted the U.S. flag on a strategic territory on the Ross Ice Shelf and established a base of operations there which he provocatively named 'Little America'. Previous expeditions had managed to endure no more than two Antarctic winters, but Byrd argued for a constant scientific presence to be maintained there. In other words, whereas the Heroic Age had been purely concerned with exploration, Byrd began the work of Antarctic colonisation. The year before his death in 1957 he saw the construction of three permanent military bases, and for the first time in its history the continent became home to an entire community.

While Byrd dreamt of mighty human settlements rising proudly out of the white Antarctic wilderness, the mind of one of his contemporaries was haunted by visions of the collapse and disintegration of great civilizations. This imagery was quintessential to the Gothic imagination of H.P. Lovecraft [**Fig. 45**], forming the subject of some of his earliest fictions and recurring with obsessive frequency until the end of his life. Equally fascinated by both the past and the future, Lovecraft delved into the obscure details of distant ages while diligently following the major scientific breakthroughs and epistemological developments of his own time. As this chapter shall examine, the great mysteries of Antarctica were a constant focal point of Lovecraft's curiosity, but it was Byrd's 1928 expedition which led him to write a novel set in the strange polar territories which even he had not yet managed to reach.



Fig. 45: H.P. Lovecraft photographed in the late 1920s

In *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936), Lovecraft's protagonists make a sensational find not altogether unlike the one which Scott and his men mistakenly believed they had made when they came across the unusual 'footprints' back in 1902. However, the life-forms they unearth are not just incredibly ancient and defy all classification; they are only part of a series of ever-more astonishing discoveries which shatter the explanatory power of science and expose what Lovecraft conceived as the inhuman horror at the foundation of history itself. In trying to solve the Earth's final great geographical enigma by using the same revolutionary means as Byrd, the Miskatonic University Expedition gradually moves beyond what can be adequately analyzed or made known. Ultimately, Lovecraft's Antarctic explorers enter a realm where the very structures of time and space break down.

As the culmination of his prolonged intellectual engagement with the far south, this chapter shall assess *Mountains of Madness* and Lovecraft's contribution to the Antarctic Gothic genre from a number of perspectives. Although Yi-Fu Tuan's

conceptualization of the Polar Regions as disturbingly alien spaces where humans encounter “the indifference or active hostility of ice-bound nature”¹⁴ is of central importance to this entire thesis, it shall be of particular relevance in this chapter. This is due to the multitude of strategies which Lovecraft uses to depict the Antarctic as an otherworldly environment, a domain truly not of this earth. Unlike the elusory zones which form the destinations of Poe and Verne’s speculative voyages, Lovecraft instead presents a precise description of a land which is unearthly even in the smallest of its details. Using Tuan’s concepts as the basis for their analyses, the four sections of this chapter shall examine the ways in which Lovecraft develops his vision of the Antarctic as a Gothic space.

The opening section will consider *Mountains of Madness* in light of a key dichotomic tension which spans Lovecraft’s work. This is the opposition between humanity’s desire for greater knowledge and its capacity to recognise that it must necessarily admit defeat in its attempts to fathom all that exists. As this section shall demonstrate, in Lovecraft’s fiction this tension finds one of its clearest manifestations in his Gothicised representation of geography, an image of our world as containing only a tiny space where safety and understanding are possible encompassed by vast realms harbouring untold horrors. Focusing on the ways in which his Antarctic interior epitomizes these forms of monstrously alien space, this section shall assess how *Mountains of Madness* articulates one of Lovecraft’s recurring themes: the notion that the impulse to explore the unknown is a flaw in the human intellect which can only lead to the most terrible consequences.

More than any other work of far southern Gothic fiction, *Mountains of Madness* is the great fantasy of the Antarctic landscape. Drawing upon Tuan’s concept of ‘mythical space’, section two will examine the various strategies underlying Lovecraft’s

¹⁴ Yi-Fu Tuan, ‘Desert and Ice: Ambivalent Aesthetics’ in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell ed. *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p 150.

representation of these regions. In describing the otherworldly geography of the far southern interior, he alludes to an extraordinary range of real and imaginary locations whose careful juxtaposition shall be discussed. Lovecraft's reliance on imagery relating to the Himalayas will be of particular interest here, and I will show how he establishes intriguing thematic parallels between the most remote unexplored territories of the northern and southern hemispheres. In addition, Byrd's exploration account shall be assessed in order to demonstrate how Lovecraft interweaved authentic and unreal phenomena to construct his speculative landscape. The fantastic proportions of the novel's uncanny topographical features will also be interpreted in light of the new perspective of the continent which resulted from the introduction of the airplane as the primary form of Antarctic exploration.

Section three shall begin by analyzing Lovecraft's treatment of time in *Mountains of Madness*. Although previous explorers had shown how the far south could function as a gateway to the Earth's prehistoric past, Byrd's 1928 expedition conducted a more wide-ranging geological survey than any before. Already fascinated by the concept of Deep Time, this section will consider how Lovecraft distorts traditional notions of temporal order in his Antarctic fiction by imagining entire periods of organic life that precede the established epochs of geological history. As mentioned above, Lovecraft's tales frequently feature a vast and decaying city of incredible antiquity. Most of *Mountains of Madness* takes place within the ruinous city of the Old Ones, and this section shall show how Lovecraft's disordered representation of time is inseparable from his vision of this fantastically complex structure. Furthermore, the novel's depictions of time and the city shall be assessed in relation to Lovecraft's engagement with the ideas of the philosopher Oswald Spengler and his experience of living in New York.

The final section will attempt to define the nature of horror in *Mountains of Madness*. Like much of his fiction, Lovecraft's novel can be read as an articulation of his anxieties concerning degeneration and the inevitable collapse of all established social hierarchies, a vision of how a racial minority can make a bid for supremacy and in so doing destroy a superlative civilization. From this perspective, the work can be viewed as one in which horror is represented in material terms, with Lovecraft providing unusually extensive descriptions of the nightmarishly strange inhabitants of his ancient world. At the same time, as a Gothic text to some extent inspired by Poe's original imaginary polar narrative *Mountains of Madness* also features another, more abstract form of horror. Lovecraft portrays the Antarctic as somewhere which conceals even greater forms of Otherness, sources of what he termed 'cosmic terror' which are never revealed. As this section shall contend, the uncanny power of Lovecraft's novel lies in its skilful combination of both of these modes of representation: the horror of the biologically monstrous and the disturbing terror of the unknowable.

Section 1: “A Hideously Amplified World of Lurking Horrors”:¹⁵ Curiosity, Anti-Knowledge, and the Exploration of the Unknown

Richard Evelyn Byrd’s first Antarctic Expedition of 1928-30 was the most highly-publicised polar mission of its era, but of the millions of Americans who followed its daily progress through newspaper reports and Byrd’s radio broadcasts it is unlikely that many did so with the same avid fascination as H.P. Lovecraft. After a hiatus of more than a decade and a half, Byrd successfully re-ignited the general public’s enthusiasm for far southern exploration, due in no small part to his sensational plans to make an aerial journey over the South Pole and survey the regions beyond it from the skies. However, as much as Lovecraft was evidently captivated by Byrd’s massively ambitious undertaking (as demonstrated by his meticulous re-creation of some of its more notable episodes in *At the Mountains of Madness*), the expedition was far from the first to have focused his mind on the great white south. Indeed, the writer had long thought of Antarctica as one of the world’s last remaining realms of mystery and wonder.

Lovecraft dated his profound curiosity concerning the Antarctic back to June 1900, when, as a ten year-old, he had learned of the return of Carsten Borchgrevink’s ‘Southern Cross’ Expedition.¹⁶ Although by then most international interest was concentrated on the imminent departure of Scott’s ‘Discovery’ Expedition, it is a testament to Lovecraft’s unusual perspicacity concerning polar exploration that, even as a child, he was one of the relatively few contemporary readers who recognised the extent of the Norwegian’s achievements. The ‘Southern Cross’ Expedition was not merely the first to establish camp on the Antarctic landmass; it also made history by overwintering on the

¹⁵ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘At the Mountains of Madness’ in Roger Luckhurst ed. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p 207.

¹⁶ H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters, Vol. I: 1911-24*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1965), p 37.

continent itself and yet again when Borchgrevink traversed the Ross Ice Shelf. Therefore, it is understandable why it was Borchgrevink (the man who had thrust himself into the absolute unknown, and accomplished much which had been considered impossible), rather than the more illustrious figures of the Heroic Age, who remained one of Lovecraft's idols.

As Lovecraft recalled, it was Borchgrevink's "new record in South Polar achievement"¹⁷ which greatly stimulated his interest in these regions. In his words, he became "an intense fanatic on the subject of Antarctic exploration",¹⁸ and later claimed to have written two historical accounts of far southern expeditions, *Voyages of Capt. Ross, R.N.* (1902) and *Wilkes's Explorations* (1902), and a third work, *Antarctic Atlas* (1903), which may have been his own attempt to amalgamate the new data brought back by Borchgrevink with the incomplete accounts of these earlier explorers.¹⁹ Although like most of his precocious scientific studies these were only juvenile efforts, Lovecraft's creation of the *Antarctic Atlas* nonetheless indicates that he was engaged in speculation about the topography of Antarctica no less than a quarter of a century before Byrd originally set off for the far south, and twenty-eight years before he wrote *Mountains of Madness* [Fig. 46].

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ All of these works were subsequently lost, S.T. Joshi, *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H.P. Lovecraft in his Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), P38.

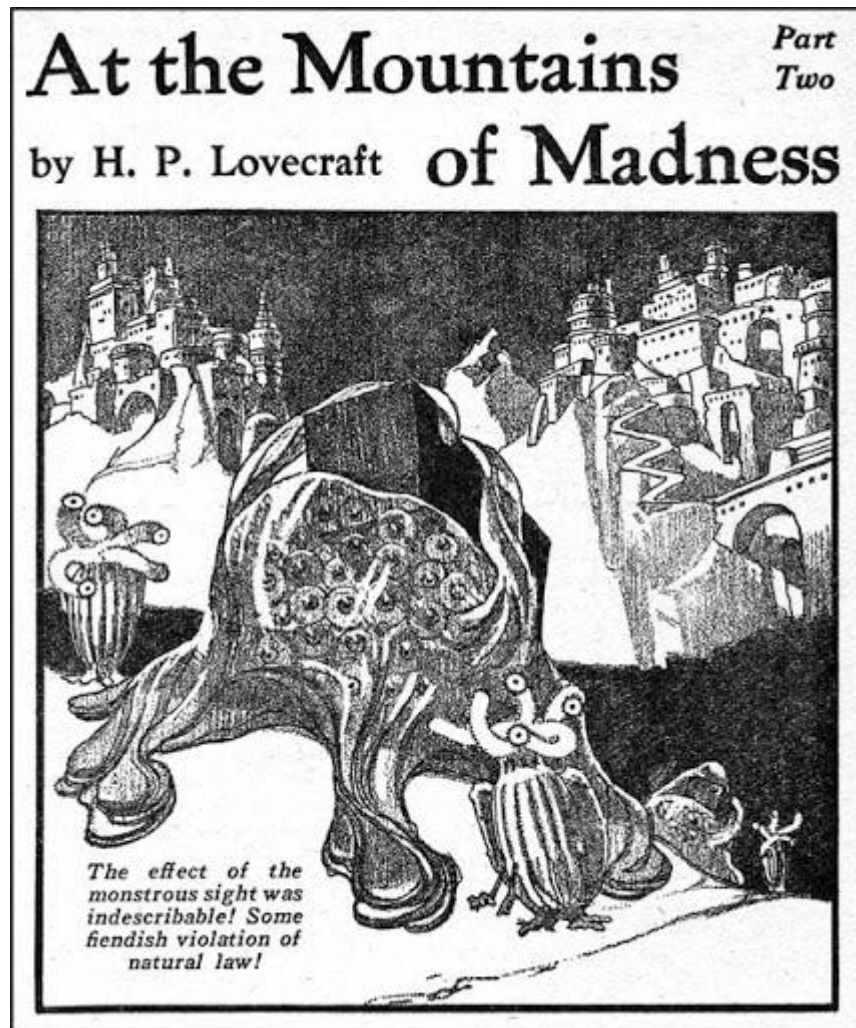


Fig. 46: Artwork for the second instalment of *At the Mountains of Madness*, *Astounding Stories*, March 1936

The magnitude of Lovecraft's obsession with the Antarctic can also be perceived from a letter he wrote in 1934. When his family fell into poverty in the early 1900s, Lovecraft stated that he had "contemplated an exit"²⁰ at the age of fourteen. Among the things which held him back from self-annihilation was a particularly tantalising question: "just *what* would Scott & Shackleton & Borchgrevink find in the great white Antarctic on their next expeditions...which I could – if I wished – live to see described?"²¹ Therefore, the idea that a great discovery in the far south was imminent clearly fascinated Lovecraft,

²⁰ H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters Vol. IV: 1932-34*, ed. ed. August Derleth and James Turner (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1976), p 358-9.

²¹ Ibid, p 359.

and he later read about Byrd's exploits with the same eagerness as the stories of the Heroic Age explorers of his youth. His literary imagination and scientific curiosity converged upon the Antarctic precisely because of its intriguing opacity, and the fact that it had taken until the twentieth century for explorers to make the first significant attempts to penetrate its central realms.

In this way, along with the enigmas which continued to surround the continent itself, it was what this distant geographical territory symbolized which sustained Lovecraft's fascination with it. In the same letter in which he discussed his enduring interest in Antarctic exploration, he explained that this was but one facet of his wider preoccupation with the "vast gulfs of space outside of all familiar lands",²² those most remote corners of the globe to which modern science had only recently gained access. For Lovecraft, these new expeditions to the South Polar Regions represented something more than simply exciting adventures: philosophically, the lasting mystification concerning the Antarctic amounted to confirmation that humanity's knowledge was, much like his own, full of puzzling blanks, and the task of completing it was nowhere near finished.

Lovecraft's reasons for believing that the Antarctic constituted an exceptional geographical realm become more comprehensible in light of the theories of Yi-Fu Tuan. Even more than the Earth's great deserts (which shall also be shown to have stimulated Lovecraft's imagination), Tuan regards the Polar Regions as the quintessential examples of those alien spaces which neither possess nor permit the necessary conditions of civilization. In an environment such as that of Antarctica, he observes that human beings are confronted by "an expanse of whiteness reaching out in all directions to seemingly nowhere",²³ making it impossible for them to construct the reassuring sensory field of the home space. Rather than being able to incorporate these icy wildernesses within their wider

²² Ibid.

²³ Yi-Fu Tuan, 'Desert and Ice: Ambivalent Aesthetics' in *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*, p 154.

conceptualization of the planet, Tuan holds that those who venture into these “implacably hostile”²⁴ environments are instead more likely to be overwhelmed by them. In other words, these frozen geographies are defined by an Otherness which cannot be erased or even reduced to the point where they can be perceived in the same way as other earthly terrains.

In the next section, Tuan’s concepts will be used to analyse the aesthetics of Lovecraft’s far southern landscape, identifying the techniques central to his depiction of it as an alien space and comparing Lovecraft’s Gothicised Antarctic world with the reality encountered by Byrd. The remainder of this section shall examine Lovecraft’s representation of Antarctic exploration itself, the nightmarish dangers he portrays as inseparable from it in *Mountains of Madness*, and assess what this form of exploration signifies within the overall context of his fiction. In approaching this subject, Tuan’s ideas are once again illuminating. As discussed in the introduction, he argues that since the Polar Regions offer none of the valuable commodities or advantageous territories normally sought after by explorers, this means that alternative explanations must be given as to why human beings have gone to such lengths to reach them.²⁵ Along with a yearning for excitement and a hunger for new geographical knowledge, Tuan contends that polar explorers are also deeply motivated by “a desire for the alienness of inhospitable space”,²⁶ which can be both conscious and subliminal.

In chapters two and three it was noted that the protagonists of Poe and Verne’s Antarctic Gothic fictions are compelled to pursue their journeys by irrational impulses which they seem mostly unaware of. As their voyages take them ever nearer to the South Pole, their longing for adventure and also their scientific curiosity are overtaken by a more powerful and primal urge to enter into unexplored realms, an intrinsically perverse desire

²⁴ Ibid, p 147.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, p 149.

which corresponds to that posited by Tuan. The fact that they inexplicably see their fates as lying somewhere in these enigmatic regions, and make no attempt to break free of their uncanny influence, is what confirms *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* and *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*'s status as Gothic fictions and not just fantastic travel narratives. Since Lovecraft's Miskatonic University Expedition only ventures to the South Polar Regions in order to realise a specific and fully credible set of scientific goals and its members appear to be motivated by the desire for knowledge alone, it can be objected that it is more accurate to describe *Mountains of Madness* as a speculative science fiction horror story set in the far south rather than a legitimate work of the Antarctic Gothic. Therefore, in order to justify the inclusion of Lovecraft's novel within this sub-genre, it is necessary to consider the writer's notion of geographical exploration more closely and to show how he conceived it in intrinsically Gothic terms.

Written five years before *Mountains of Madness*, the opening passage of Lovecraft's key tale 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1926) contains the famous statement that mankind inhabits "a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far".²⁷ If we stray beyond the confines of this mental space, it is inevitable that we shall come to know of the "terrifying vistas of our reality, and of our frightful position therein".²⁸ The narrator suggests that the force which may lead us to do this is scientific curiosity, which has "hitherto harmed us little"²⁹ but whose "deadly light"³⁰ may yet expose the true terribleness of our predicament. Lovecraft had established this connection in an even more dramatic fashion five years earlier. 'Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family' (1921) begins with the similar statement that "[l]ife is a hideous thing, and from the background behind what we know of it peer daemoniacal

²⁷ H.P. Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu' in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 24.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

hints of truth which make it sometimes a thousandfold more hideous”.³¹ Its narrator maintains that science, already responsible for many “shocking revelations”,³² could yet become “the ultimate exterminator of our species”,³³ since it has the potential to unleash a “reserve of unguessed horrors”³⁴ more than capable of destroying us.

Although he merely appears to be representing the limited scope of the human mind, Lovecraft’s choice of metaphors in the first paragraph of ‘Cthulhu’ is significant: our existing knowledge is an isolated realm encircled by a dark abyss, and it is an error to venture outside of its protection. As the narrator of ‘Arthur Jermyn’ insists, our everyday existence provides us with abundant warnings that the outer world contains things we are fortunate to know nothing about; to intentionally seek such knowledge can only result in a cataclysm. However, it is no coincidence that these tales, whose fundamental assertion is that mankind’s intellectual voyaging is fearfully misguided, are also intrinsically concerned with geographical exploration. One of the main plot strands of ‘Cthulhu’ follows a Norwegian sailor who becomes the reluctant explorer of an uncharted area of the South Pacific which is home to the dreaded city of R’lyeh, while Arthur Jermyn’s irresistible fixation with the mysteries of the Congo sees him uncover the region’s bizarre links to his own ancestry. Therefore, the epistemic frontiers in these tales are depicted as commensurate with those of earthly geography: to leave behind the known world is to surrender oneself to a terrifying reality.

‘Cthulhu’ and ‘Arthur Jermyn’ are just two of the numerous stories in which Lovecraft’s theme of the insatiable and catastrophic lure of the unknown is enacted using the form of exploration narratives. In such tales as ‘Dagon’ (1919), ‘The Nameless City’ (1921), ‘Under the Pyramids’ (1924), ‘The Temple’ (1925), and ‘The Shadow Over

³¹ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘Facts Concerning the Late Arthur Jermyn and His Family’ in S.T. Joshi ed. *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 1999), p 14.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Innsmouth' (1936) his protagonists, as often by their own volition as by accident, find themselves cut off from all that is certain and familiar and enter into realms of maddening strangeness. Whether they wander into waters too many degrees below the equator or into desert wastes which have been shunned since prehistory, these characters only have to move slightly outside the margins of traditional cartographic territories before they become lost in regions which are essentially unfathomable. Once again, like the meagre extent of humanity's understanding, Lovecraft reinforces the notion that only a slim fraction of our planet possesses the safety and stability which for Tuan characterise the "humanised world",³⁵ and this tiny sphere is everywhere encompassed by vast alien spaces.

Section four shall offer a more detailed analysis of the *Mountains of Madness* as an articulation of Lovecraft's concept of cosmic horror, but if he imagines our world as full of places as cryptic as the boundless gulfs of the universe does this also influence his representation of exploration? In 'Supernatural Horror in Literature', (1927) he writes that "[m]an's first instincts and emotions formed his response to the environment in which he found himself".³⁶ Since the natural world contained so much that was beyond its comprehension, ancient humanity primarily regarded it with "sensations of awe and fear".³⁷ Lovecraft then observes that although "the area of the unknown has been steadily contracting for thousands of years",³⁸ the human race remains forever haunted by a sense of "cosmic mystery".³⁹ Primitive man's terror at mysterious phenomena was so profound, that Lovecraft suggests this is the reason why the relatively unexplored regions of the earth continue to instil a metaphysical dread in humanity even in the modern age.

³⁵ Yi-FuTuan, *Landscapes of Fear* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p 8.

³⁶ H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, ed. E.F. Bleiler (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), p 13.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, p 14.

³⁹ Ibid.

Lovecraft's tales may feature extradimensional monstrosities and engage with what he termed the "enlarged vistas and broken barriers"⁴⁰ generated by atomic physics, but his depiction of geographical exploration as man's unwise intrusions into places which should be avoided firmly links his work to the tradition of American Gothic literature. Charles L. Crow has proposed that this form of fiction has its roots in what he terms "the foundational narratives of European Americans",⁴¹ which were stories of travel and discovery in far-off regions. Crow argues that in the work of writers such as Poe, Melville, and Ambrose Bierce the "wild landscape"⁴² of conventional adventure tales is transformed into an uncanny setting and "a zone for encounters with the unknown".⁴³ Even after it began to adopt the conventions of realist fiction, Crow holds that the American Gothic genre continued to envisage what he terms "a universe of vast forces that can overwhelm and terrify the individual",⁴⁴ which often took the symbolic form of a forbidding wilderness.

Although Lovecraft's fictionalised New England is revealed as full of sinister territories peopled by degenerate hybrids, the great wildernesses in his tales are located outside of his native land. It is the desert sands of Arabia, the far corners of the Pacific Ocean, and the Antarctic itself which are of central importance in his work, as these are the domains of his most abominable survivors from the distant past. As explained earlier, he was imaginatively drawn to these regions precisely because they had rarely, if ever, been infiltrated by human beings, and science could still not precisely say what existed there. While Lovecraft maintained that all weird fiction should aim to create the impression that "a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature"⁴⁵ could occur

⁴⁰ Ibid, p 106.

⁴¹ Charles L. Crow, *American Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), p 151.

⁴² Ibid, p 32.

⁴³ Ibid, p 45.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p 103.

⁴⁵ *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, p 15.

anywhere, Stefan Dziemianowicz has argued that the techniques of “geographic displacement”⁴⁶ which he utilises in order to isolate his protagonists amidst “the terra incognita of the rational world”,⁴⁷ above all his fictional exploration narratives, are some of his most effective methods for representing “the individual confronting by himself the vastness of the unknown”.⁴⁸ To search these unmapped places is to risk awakening inconceivable things against which we are defenceless.

In the tales in which he uses such displacement techniques, Lovecraft shows that there is every reason why certain regions of the earth have remained unexplored. Regardless of his heavily theoretical approach to the weird tale, Piotr Spyra argues that like so many earlier works of Gothic fiction the majority of Lovecraft’s stories can be read as “a warning against venturing into places where man clearly does not belong”.⁴⁹ Furthermore, in Lovecraft’s vision of things the degree to which a geographical area stays defiantly unknown is proportionate to the menace lurking somewhere within it. As someone who had followed polar expeditions for all of his adult life, by the late 1920s Lovecraft would have pieced together the few sections of Antarctica which had come under the scrutiny of science and known that it was the last great landmass to remain mostly unexplored. Therefore, it can be understood why he once wrote that the continent was “paramount in my geographico-fantastic imagination”⁵⁰ and why, in *Mountains of*

⁴⁶ Stefan Dziemianowicz, ‘Outsiders and Aliens: The Use of Isolation in Lovecraft’s Fiction’ in David E. Schultz and S.T. Joshi ed. *An Epicure of the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honour of H.P. Lovecraft* (Cranbury New Jersey: Associated University Press: 1991), p 160.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Piotr Spyra, ‘Gothic Time and Non-Euclidean Spaces: Temporal Geometries of Terror in the Works of H.P. Lovecraft’ in Andrzej Wicher, Piotr Spyra and Joanna Matyjaszczyk ed. *Basic Categories of Fantastic Literature Revisited* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p 44.

⁵⁰ H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters III: 1929-31* ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1971), p 218.

Madness, he portrays it as the “ultimate waste of forbidden secrets”⁵¹ and the “centre of all earthly mystery”.⁵²

However, Lovecraft believed that mankind’s relationship with those enigmatic spaces on the fringes of civilisation involved more than just the experience of primal terror. In ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’ he maintains that even though human beings instinctively perceive such regions as constituting “a world of peril and evil possibilities”,⁵³ something in their nature also leads them to gravitate towards them. To their sense of foreboding the “inevitable fascination of wonder and curiosity is superadded”,⁵⁴ producing “a composite body of keen emotion and imaginative provocation”⁵⁵ which throughout history has stimulated mankind’s investigation of the most distant corners of the Earth. As the narrator of ‘The Nameless City’ (a tale frequently identified as a precursor to *Mountains of Madness*⁵⁶) elucidates this tension, the ruined edifice he sought both “repelled me and bade me retreat”⁵⁷ but also attracted him with its promise of things “no man else had ever dared to see”.⁵⁸

In other words, Lovecraft’s fiction depicts human psychology as marked by a paradox: we seldom experience fear more intensely than when we contemplate those shadowy realms which border upon the known world, and yet we possess an inexorable impulse to penetrate them. As Spyra has noted, he portrays human curiosity as “more of a general than specifically scientific kind”,⁵⁹ an instinctual desire to apprehend the very

⁵¹ H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p 219.

⁵² Ibid, p 215.

⁵³ *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, p 14.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ The argument that Lovecraft’s Antarctic Gothic novel is a reworking of this earlier tale has been made by David E. Schultz in ‘From Microcosm to Macrocosm: The Growth of Lovecraft’s Cosmic Vision’ and Stefan Dziemianowski ‘Outsiders and Aliens’ in *An Epicure of the Terrible*, and by Joshi in *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 2005), p 407.

⁵⁷ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘The Nameless City’ in S.T. Joshi ed. *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories*, p 30.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Basic Categories of Fantastic Literature Revisited*, p 44.

things we should stay away from. Byrd perceived a similar contradiction in his own nature; in *Little America* he writes that the extreme isolation and dreadful conditions of the Antarctic interior were the chief reasons why this “central mystery in a continent of mysteries”⁶⁰ possessed “a magnetism peculiar to itself”⁶¹ for men like him. Just like those characters in Lovecraft’s tales who persist in reading forbidden grimoires even when they know this will drive them insane and may even bring down destruction upon the whole planet, his explorers are figures in whom fear and fascination are inseparably combined, giving rise to an uncontrollable force. This amounts to a powerful existential compulsion to enter those places which remain as mysterious as the entire Earth must have seemed to man when he first walked upon it. In this way, it resembles what Tuan describes as that all-conquering determination to become caught up in “a sublime ‘otherness’”⁶² which he believes has all along induced explorers to make their journeys to the Polar Regions.

Now that that the philosophical perspective underlying Lovecraft’s conception of exploration has been clarified, the question of whether *Mountains of Madness* can be regarded as a work of the Antarctic Gothic can be approached once again. In the novel’s opening section William Dyer, the geology professor and one of the initiators of the Miskatonic Expedition, discloses the reasons why it was undertaken. As he explains, its object was “wholly that of securing deep-level specimens of rock and soil from the various parts of the antarctic continent”⁶³ and he had “no wish to be a pioneer in any other field than this”.⁶⁴ These samples were necessary because they would provide the clearest evidence of “the primal life history of this bleak realm of ice and death”,⁶⁵ something

⁶⁰ *Little America*, p 346.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*, p 154.

⁶³ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘At the Mountains of Madness’ in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 182.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p 183.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

which would be “of the highest importance to our knowledge of the earth’s past”.⁶⁶ Since obtaining this information rather than charting new terrains was its goal, Dyer states that the expedition was originally confined to regions already explored by previous polar missions.

While Dyer admits that the thought of “plunging deeper and deeper into that treacherous and sinister white immensity”⁶⁷ appalled him, his carefully formulated plans were thrown into chaos by the biologist Lake, whose “strange and dogged insistence on a westward – or rather, north-westward prospecting trip”⁶⁸ was responsible for the expedition’s disastrous intrusion “into regions never trodden by human foot or penetrated by human imagination”.⁶⁹ Having realised that he could do nothing to stop him, Dyer records how he followed Lake’s progress as he probed further into the Antarctic interior than anyone before.

In these early sections of *Mountains of Madness* Dyer and Lake appear to embody the two opposing impulses in human nature, the innate dread of those places of timeless mystery and the desire to embrace the unknown, but this does not remain the case for long. After reaching the gruesome carnage of the sub-expedition’s camp, Dyer relates how he then found his own mind suffused with “enough sheer scientific zeal and adventurousness to wonder about the unknown realm beyond those mysterious mountains”.⁷⁰ Even though Lake’s demented fixation with finding a way into this place has already resulted in many brutal deaths including his own, Dyer now also falls under its uncanny influence and he embarks on a flight of discovery to the very same “hidden transmontane world”.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p 192.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p 190.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p 191.

⁷⁰ Ibid, p 218.

⁷¹ Ibid.

On reflection, Dyer admits that their behaviour was “suicidally foolish”⁷² and scarcely distinct from insanity, but he claims that they were animated by a mental compulsion beyond ordinary analysis and so powerful that all thoughts of self-preservation were forgotten. He conjectures that it was a more extreme manifestation of the same one which leads men to “stalk deadly beasts through African jungles to photograph them or study their habits”.⁷³ As Dyer explains, he and Danforth were the victims of “the lure of the unplumbed”,⁷⁴ a malignant force stronger than most human beings can comprehend and the one which “brought us to this unearthly polar waste in the first place”.⁷⁵ Only the approach of the vile Shoggoth finally releases them from what Dyer terms this deadly form of “autohypnotism”,⁷⁶ and sends them fleeing forever from the “white, aeon-dead world of the ultimate south”.⁷⁷

If Dyer’s instinct to delve ever-deeper into the far southern interior, regardless of the accumulating portents of doom, has no basis in reason it is therefore no different from that which summoned first Pym and then Joerling to this “great unknown continent and its cryptic world of frozen death”.⁷⁸ Consequently, it is clear that Lovecraft’s novel belongs as much to the subgenre of Antarctic Gothic fiction as Poe and Verne’s. As with the voyages of exploration depicted in these earlier works, the Miskatonic expedition’s search for knowledge in the South Polar Regions brings it into contact with phenomena which transcend the limits of what science can adequately elucidate. Utterly confident that they can unlock the secrets of “the strangest, weirdest, and most terrible of all the corners of the earth’s globe”,⁷⁹ for the majority of Lovecraft’s explorers it instead becomes the site of their massacre. In other words, like Poe and Verne before him, Lovecraft characterises the

⁷² Ibid, p 268.

⁷³ Ibid, p 261.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p 268.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p 258.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p 188.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p 185.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p 248.

Antarctic as a place where humanity's overpowering urge to behold alien space becomes impossible to distinguish from what Tuan has termed "an unrecognized desire for death".⁸⁰

At the same time, what enables Lovecraft to evoke so much terror from this theme of the irrational forces at the core of a modern scientific project is the novel's incorporation of the technical details of exploration narratives. As Jason C. Eckhardt has demonstrated, Byrd's published accounts of his first Antarctic expedition (both his articles in the press and his enormously popular memoir *Little America* (1930)) undoubtedly provided Lovecraft with much of the information which gives *Mountains of Madness* its semblance of authenticity.⁸¹ Indeed, no fictional expedition in any work of Antarctic Gothic literature analysed in this thesis was more closely modelled on a factual one than Lovecraft's was on Byrd's. On the strength of the extensive similarities pointed out by Eckhardt, it can be concluded that Byrd's mission directly inspired Lovecraft to finally produce a work set in the far south and that he intended for *Mountains of Madness* to be read in light of its impressive results. However, it is the differences between the events of the novel and those of Byrd's narrative which are central to its meaning.

Within the first two sections of *Mountains of Madness*, the Miskatonic expedition duplicates in a matter of days many of the great feats which Byrd's expedition had taken two years to accomplish:⁸² a successful flight over the South Pole is undertaken, a triumphant ascent of Mount Fridtjof Nansen is made, rock samples are obtained from the inland locations which Byrd's chief scientist Laurence Gould believed "held the key to the

⁸⁰ *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*, p 147.

⁸¹ See Jason C. Eckhardt, 'Behind the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraft and the Antarctic in 1930', *Lovecraft Studies* No. 14 (Spring 1987), 31-38.

⁸² For the most detailed assessments of Byrd's inaugural expedition to Antarctica and its achievements see Eugene Rogers 'Richard E. Byrd's First Antarctic Expedition', *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 110, No. 2 (2002), p 155-174, Leslie Rose, 'Exploring a Secret Land: The Literary and Technological Legacies of Richard E. Byrd', *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 110, No. 2 (2002), p 175-208, and Harold E. Saunders, 'The Flight of Admiral Byrd to the South Pole and the Exploration of Marie Byrd Land', *The Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 82, No. 5, (June 1940), p 801-820.

geology”⁸³ of the entire continent, a series of aerial surveys manages to identify “new topographical features in areas unreached by previous explorers”,⁸⁴ and a “permanent village”⁸⁵ is constructed amid the ice. These were the celebrated episodes of human endeavour which had captivated the American public, made Byrd a national hero,⁸⁶ and turned *Little America* into a bestseller,⁸⁷ but in *Mountains of Madness* Lovecraft treats them so dismissively that they appear totally inconsequential. Despite their importance, Dyer makes only the briefest of references to these achievements and instead concentrates on explaining the “epoch-making significance”⁸⁸ of the expedition’s other discoveries, a truth so unimaginable that he is hardly capable of divulging it.

“Aviation cannot claim mastery of the globe”⁸⁹ Byrd had declared, “until the South Pole and its vast surrounding mystery be opened up by airplane”.⁹⁰ Although Lovecraft must have perceived Byrd’s mission as marking the commencement of a momentous new era of discovery in Antarctica and been immensely eager to learn about the distant lands which technology had placed within the explorer’s reach, in *Mountains of Madness* the Miskatonic expedition’s attempt to divest these desolate wastes of their ambiguity only intensifies it. As in all of Lovecraft’s works featuring geographical exploration, the novel performs a masterful reversal by depicting it as a misguided form of meddling which threatens to expose the illusory nature of the entire worldview mankind has constructed for itself. The Miskatonic team travels to the far south to establish its scientific connections to the rest of the planet, but in reality they have not the faintest

⁸³ Laurence M. Gould, ‘The Geological Sledge Trip’ in *Little America*, p 401.

⁸⁴ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 189.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p 195.

⁸⁶ As well as becoming the youngest man ever to attain the rank of Rear Admiral after receiving a special promotion from the United States Congress in 1929, Byrd was also awarded a Gold Medal by the American Geographical Society for his services to exploration the following year.

⁸⁷ First published in November 1930, *Little America* became a runaway success and the first three editions sold-out within three months.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p 201.

⁸⁹ Richard E. Byrd, *Skyward: Man’s Mastery of the Air* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2015) p 300.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*.

conception of its true significance. In the end, their efforts only reveal that the continent has some vastly important but esoteric connection with what Lovecraft termed the “infinite reservoir of mystery [which] still engulfs most of the outer cosmos”.⁹¹

If Lovecraft’s journey into the unknown ends in violent death for most of the Miskatonic explorers, the fate of the survivors is scarcely less terrible. Dyer feels himself fortunate to have left behind that “haunted, accursed realm where life and death, space and time, have made black and blasphemous alliances in the unknown epochs since matter first writhed and swam on the planet’s scarce-cooled crust”,⁹² but the Antarctic has not released its hold over his intellect. His reckless urge to satisfy his curiosity has resulted in the loss “of all that peace and balance which the normal mind possesses through its accustomed conception of external nature and nature’s laws”.⁹³ The geologist may have returned to the outside world physically intact, but with his faith in these essential components of his scientific outlook shattered his existence has now become almost unendurable.

Whereas Byrd had added impressively to the known territories of Antarctica and secured the vital rock samples which enabled geologists to reach new conclusions regarding the Earth’s development, the secrets uncovered by the Miskatonic expedition result in the complete dissolution of all scientific certainties. By the end of the novel Lovecraft leaves humanity trapped between two equally hopeless alternatives: we cannot take refuge in our former viewpoint for it is now utterly meaningless, nor can we risk any further exploration of the universe for this may lead to the eradication of our entire species. Dyer’s predicament is an inescapable one, for in Lovecraft’s tales, as Timo Airaksinen has written, “the final stage of knowing is also the last, because the knower is mad and knows

⁹¹ *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, p 14.

⁹² *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 213.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p 207.

nothing”.⁹⁴ In other words, what the geologist has brought back from the far south is not really knowledge at all but a terrible and corrosive form of anti-knowledge.

The degree to which Dyer’s conception of reality has unravelled as a result of his experiences in the far south is conveyed through the ever-more fantastic excesses of his language. As someone well-versed in Antarctic exploration literature, Lovecraft must surely have appreciated that the foremost challenge for the authors of these narratives was to capture the sheer enormousness of this frozen world and the sensations of observing its strange phenomena in language which still retained its scientific precision and clarity. Due to the unique physical and psychical conditions associated with these regions, Tuan has suggested that the memoirs of polar explorers can be viewed as “secular equivalents”⁹⁵ of the cryptic writings of those hermitic ascetics who in ancient times retreated into the great wildernesses and recorded their ecstatic spiritual visions. Byrd, whose account was Lovecraft’s immediate reference point during the composition of *Mountains of Madness*, recognised the contradiction of trying to maintain a tone of scientific objectivity when confronting a terrain so awesomely alien that it seemed to oppose this very form of language. Attempting to describe an Antarctic sunset, he wrote that in this place he found his mind “struggling for adequate expression with so overpowering a sense of helplessness as to cause the best words to end in muddled indecision”.⁹⁶

In *Mountains of Madness* Lovecraft uses this anxiety surrounding the linguistic representation of the Antarctic to hallucinatory effect. The tone of the early sections of Dyer’s narrative is controlled, sober, and rigorous. He provides exact technical descriptions of the Miskatonic expedition’s voyage to the far south, its drilling operations, the significance of the rock specimens it sought, and the various aeroplane flights which were

⁹⁴ Timo Airaksinen, *The Philosophy of H.P. Lovecraft: The Route to Horror* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999), p 188.

⁹⁵ *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts*, p 154.

⁹⁶ *Little America*, p 192.

made. However, as Dyer recounts their progress into the Antarctic interior this tone is steadily displaced by one of spiralling mania. He repeatedly states that he is on the verge of revealing things about the nature of the continent which have been deliberately excluded from all previously published accounts of the Miskatonic expedition, and begins using hyperbolic language which could not be further removed from that of rational man of science. Like some unhinged religious fanatic, he describes the “hideously dead or sleeping polar waste”⁹⁷ as somewhere “aeon-cursed”,⁹⁸ “blasphemous”⁹⁹ and “monstrous”,¹⁰⁰ a positively evil place which is the site of a “fiendish violation of known natural law”.¹⁰¹

In this way, as someone who perceives that “human curiosity is undying”¹⁰² and has all along been responsible for humanity’s “age-long pursuit of the unknown”,¹⁰³ Dyer’s experiences in the Antarctic have now left him desperately aware that this instinct must be curbed if the human race is to endure very much longer. However, Lovecraft ingeniously insinuates that it is inevitable that another group of far southern explorers shall unleash the very things he has come to fear so intensely. Since their return, Dyer explains that he and his Miskatonic colleagues have fought to discourage any further interest in the continent, and “to keep others from meddling with the inner antarctic”.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the only reason he has “been forced into speech”¹⁰⁵ about what actually took place is because this may be the only thing which prevents the “wholesale boring and melting of the ancient ice caps”,¹⁰⁶ proposed by the imminently departing Starkweather-Moore Expedition, an operation which Dyer is convinced will “bring up that which we know may end the world”.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁷ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 273.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p 219.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p 223.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p 233.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p 222.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p 214.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p 219.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p 182.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p 214.

To bring this section to a conclusion, it is clear that Roger Luckhurst is quite correct when he maintains that in Lovecraft's fiction "the transgressions [of his characters] are spatial".¹⁰⁸ Mankind's wanderings into the alien spaces outside of its little sphere of understanding not only result in horrific deaths for most of those involved but also leave any unfortunate survivors haunted by endless ontological uncertainty. For these doomed explorers, there is no 'ordinary world' to return to at the end of their terrifying journeys. As Spyra has written, Lovecraft's tales involving different kinds of exploration constantly suggest that "by bringing light to previously unseen places we may accidentally stumble upon a horror which our scientific discourse will fail to describe".¹⁰⁹ This is why Dyer insists that "[i]t is absolutely necessary, for the peace and safety of mankind, that some of earth's dark, dead corners and unplumbed depths be let alone".¹¹⁰ Although Lovecraft himself may have found much to admire in science's ongoing efforts to master the 'Great White South', in *Mountains of Madness* the history of Antarctic exploration is transformed into nothing less than a progressive movement towards an apocalypse.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p xiv.

¹⁰⁹ *Basic Categories of Fantastic Literature Revisited*, p 44.

¹¹⁰ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 283.

Section 2: “...The Great Unknown Continent and its Cryptic World of Frozen Death”:¹¹¹ Mythical Spaces, Gothic Geographies and Lovecraft’s Representation of the Antarctic Landscape

In the previous section it was argued that while New England and its environs may be the principal backdrop of the majority of Lovecraft’s tales, it is those places which lie at the far ends of the earth which perform a more intriguing function in his fiction. Such seemingly ordinary locations as the stately town of Arkham, the backwoods village of Dunwich, and the ruinous seaport of Innsmouth¹¹² are home to creatures whose monstrosity signifies that modern man has no more than the shallowest awareness of what has actually transpired on his planet. Repulsive though these things may be, they are nothing compared to what awaits humanity in those distant regions which it has left mostly untouched. These are the true sites of horror in Lovecraft’s fiction, the places where mankind comes face to face with the unfathomable.

Lovecraft’s utilisation of specific geographical settings throughout his work was by no means arbitrary. Indeed, his tales acquire a new degree of complexity once we understand that all of them take place in a series of intricately interconnected fictional realms. For Lovecraft, the location of his fantastic narratives within meticulously described symbolic landscapes was never simply an aesthetic decision. Instead, he saw this as quintessential not only to his own approach to uncanny literature but also to any modern formulation of the Gothic tale. In ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’, he states that in the twentieth century authors could set such stories either in landscapes “made realistically

¹¹¹ H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* in Roger Luckhurst ed. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p 185.

¹¹² See H.P. Lovecraft, ‘The Case of Charles Dexter Ward’ in S.T. Joshi ed., *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 2001), p 90-206, ‘The Dunwich Horror’ in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 80-121, and ‘The Shadow over Innsmouth’, in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 320-382.

intense by close consistency and perfect fidelity to Nature”¹¹³ or in “a realm of phantasy, with atmosphere cunningly adapted to the visualisation of a delicately exotic world of unreality beyond space and time”.¹¹⁴ As someone who depicted both types of landscape over the course of his career, Lovecraft held that whichever a writer chose to create they must not violate the principles of “naturalness, convincingness, [and] artistic-smoothness”¹¹⁵ which he regarded as integral to the genre.

Faye Ringel has written that Lovecraft went about the realization of his landscapes with such artistic skill, and endowed them with such an exceptional sense of place, that it is possible that they “may be his greatest contribution to the American Gothic”.¹¹⁶ However, to consider these territories as merely constituting fictionalized versions of actual geography greatly diminishes his originality. As Robert H. Waugh has argued,¹¹⁷ Lovecraft constructed many kinds of landscape (only some of which possess any connection to genuine places) to serve specific functions in his work. According to Waugh, these landscapes fall into four general categories: ‘personal’ landscapes, which Lovecraft closely modelled upon those New England locales which were familiar to him; ‘ideal’ landscapes, which are evanescent glimpses of a transcendent and supernal version of the real world; ‘shadow’ landscapes, which Lovecraft portrays as abhorrent because of their total incompatibility with those normally found on Earth; finally, Waugh identifies what he terms ‘double’ landscapes, which combine the ideal and the shadow and resemble some of the elements of our world while remaining overwhelmingly alien.

¹¹³ H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* ed. E.F. Bleiler (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), p 87.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Faye Ringel ‘I Am Providence: H.P. Lovecraft’ in Charles L. Crow ed. *A Companion to American Gothic* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), p 267.

¹¹⁷ Robert H. Waugh, ‘Landscapes, Selves, and Others in Lovecraft’ in David E. Schultz and S.T. Joshi ed. *An Epicure in the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honour of H.P. Lovecraft* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1991), p 220-247.

Waugh regards the double landscape as the most important of all of those found in Lovecraft's work. He writes that its significance lies in the fact that it is an attempt to represent "neither the world as it seems, nor as it ought to be, nor as it is",¹¹⁸ but instead this kind of symbolic territory "indicates the world as it means".¹¹⁹ In other words, Waugh asserts that the function of these landscapes, which appear to form a part of our world and yet do not seem to belong to it, is to embody a metaphysical division which Lovecraft considered to be a fundamental aspect of human existence: the fact that the universe we inhabit, in spite of all our efforts to naturalize it and make it intelligible, is still so suffused with the numinous that our conception of it is forever ambiguous. In Waugh's opinion, Lovecraft's Gothicised depiction of Antarctica is one of the most sophisticated examples of his 'double' landscapes.¹²⁰

In view of Waugh's argument, this section will analyse the dualism underlying the Antarctic world of *Mountains of Madness* from several perspectives. It shall begin by examining how Lovecraft's representation of this landscape is informed by an array of topographical spaces from across the globe, and will reveal how he portrays it as the apotheosis of those places which make up the very borderland of ordinary geographical reality. The far southern interior was only one of several remote sites which exploration was uncovering for the first time when Lovecraft was composing *Mountains of Madness*, and this section shall consider how he amalgamates these different places with other, purely imaginary realms to enhance the overriding sense of mystery enveloping his Antarctic setting.

As mentioned already, Byrd's pioneering flights aimed at producing a more accurate image of the continent than ever before. This section will consider the Antarctic landscape of *Mountains of Madness* in light of how it imaginatively responds to this

¹¹⁸ Ibid, p 226.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

cutting-edge form of exploration. Like the Gothic authors already examined in this thesis, Lovecraft carefully grounds his polar narrative in a wealth of authentic geographical knowledge before he proceeds to depict the phantasmagoric regions of its interior. In order to demonstrate how he utilises the inherent otherworldliness of the Antarctic to make this transition from the real to the unreal, Byrd's descriptions of its strange perceptual conditions will also be considered. In this way, like the South Polar Regions of Poe and Verne, the novel's Gothicised landscape is both a speculative space whose vastness and undisturbed ancientness can support the most fantastic conjectures, and an isolated zone containing terrors whose connection to the outside world must never be deciphered.

As discussed in the introduction, Yi-Fu Tuan has made an analysis of what he calls 'mythical' spaces. Rather than just complete fantasies, he regards these often elaborate imaginary geographies as essential because in his words they have made it possible for human beings to "understand man's place in nature".¹²¹ Tuan contends that these mythical spaces are intellectual constructs according to which humanity interprets reality, shifting, symbolic zones which occupy the gaps in our actual empirical knowledge of the world and by doing so allow us to more accurately envisage our relationship with it. He observes that throughout history humanity conceived extensive imaginary visions of those territories which existed far beyond its range of perception, and projected them upon these unknown regions. For this reason, he argues that this natural tendency to create mythical spaces was integral to mankind's exploration of the globe because it transformed purely abstract spaces into distinct places which human beings then went in search of.¹²²

One curious aspect of *Mountains of Madness* is that Lovecraft's narrator only refers to the far south as the 'antarctic', and reserves the capitalised form of the word for the Antarctic Circle and Ocean. Given that Lovecraft goes to considerable lengths to

¹²¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p 86.

¹²² Ibid, p 85.

replicate the technical style of contemporary exploration accounts, the fact that he does not refer to the Antarctic by its proper name (even though it had been in common use for many decades¹²³) seems to stand in glaring contradiction to his overall intention to make the work as credible as possible. Although this can be attributed to the writer's preference for a more antiquarian terminology, it may have greater relevance. While Lovecraft made use of the most up-to-date geographical information in creating his polar landscape, his adoption of this spelling suggests that his protagonist still perceives the great unresolved space of Antarctica in the ambiguous terms of an earlier historical period, and that its position as the most enigmatic territory on the planet has remained almost unchanged.

If Tuan maintains that such mythical geographies are inevitably displaced by empirical knowledge, Lovecraft's deliberate use of this obsolete spelling can be interpreted as his first indication that the far south has yet to undergo this transformation. He subsequently reinforces this perception, for when Dyer beholds the tremendous mountains atop the Polar Plateau they evokes in him an "uneasy consciousness of archaean mythical resemblances",¹²⁴ as if elements of this hitherto unseen section of the Antarctic landscape were somehow already present in his mind. Tuan has written that since human comprehension "can never be complete, [it] is necessarily imbued with myths".¹²⁵ However, what disturbs Dyer is the notion that this mountain range cannot be translated from the realm of myth for it exactly resembles a realm whose image has recurred down through the history of human thought.

Later, when Dyer investigates the great city itself his thoughts return to those "eldritch primal myths that had so persistently haunted me since my first sight of this dead

¹²³ Although the Edinburgh geographer and Cartographer Royal John George Bartholomew (1860-1920) is credited as the first to have given the South Polar continent the official name of Antarctica on one of his series of revolutionary scientific maps in 1887, the use of the term 'Antarctic' to describe this landmass was well-established by this time, dating back at least as far as the Polar Map produced by the pioneering French cartographer Nicolas Sanson in 1657. See Susan Woodburn, 'Bartholomew and the Naming of Antarctica' in *CAIRT: Newsletter of the Scottish Maps Forum*, Issue 13 (July 2008), p 4-6.

¹²⁴ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 208.

¹²⁵ *Space and Place*, p 98.

antarctic world”.¹²⁶ Like the spectacular mountain range, what both astonishes and appals him about this vast ruined structure is its unnatural affinity with those places which are “recalled only dimly in the most obscure and distorted myths”,¹²⁷ sites which he rationally assumed could not still exist, even if they ever truly did. Lovecraft eventually reveals the reasons why the Antarctic landscape breeds such associations, but for Dyer it represents a duality which cannot be reconciled. Although he cannot deny its presence on the Earth’s surface, his intellect cannot remove this region from mythical space because it appears to belong more to the realm of ancient fantasies than to actual reality. It is a place where mankind’s most arcane imaginings are manifested in material form

Generating no unified vision of what exists there, the varied collection of topographies which Dyer compares the Antarctic landscape to only makes it even more of a challenge to read. At different stages in the text, he notes resemblances between the interior’s towering peaks and labyrinthine megalopolis and the Giant’s Causeway on the coast of Ireland,¹²⁸ Colorado’s Garden of the Gods¹²⁹ and the monumental rock formations of the Arizona desert.¹³⁰ To this list he then adds such man-made sites as the Incan citadel of Machu Picchu,¹³¹ the Sumerian city of Kish¹³² and the Edomite tombs of Petra.¹³³ However, this multiplicity of allusions only means that Lovecraft’s Antarctic plateau and its dead city become grotesquely overdetermined. Since they constantly resemble different things, all this gives rise to is a sense of endless mutability and inconceivable hybridization. As Stephen J. Pyne has stated, in many ways what Lovecraft represents in

¹²⁶ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 223.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p 225.

¹²⁸ *Ibid*, p 220.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*, p222.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p 220.

¹³² *Ibid*.

¹³³ *Ibid*.

the novel is “a nebulous landscape”,¹³⁴ a constantly reconfiguring myriad of disparate elements.

If it were not already close to impossible to envisage a site where all of these places are stupendously combined, Lovecraft extends the imaginative potential of the Antarctic interior still further by alluding to Hyperborea,¹³⁵ the land of giants at the extreme north of the world in Greek mythology, the sunken empire of Atlantis,¹³⁶ and the fabled continent of Lemuria,¹³⁷ as well as several other mythical cities which appeared in his own stories and in the work of his contemporaries Clark Ashton Smith¹³⁸ and Robert E. Howard.¹³⁹ In this way, he uses the duality of the Antarctic landscape not only to consciously collapse the distinctions between natural and artificial structures, historical reality and legend, but also between authentic geographical realms and ones which are complete inventions. Therefore, even after the Miskatonic expedition has finished its aerial survey, this polar landscape continues to constitute a mythical geography because it has not come to resemble what Tuan has classified as those “pragmatic and scientifically conceived spaces”¹⁴⁰ which make up the quotidian human world. In contrast to those regions of the Earth’s surface which have been exhaustively described and definitively mapped, Lovecraft’s Antarctic interior “ignores the logic of exclusion and contradiction”¹⁴¹ which Tuan sees as the dominant characteristic of such places.

Instead of removing the mythical perceptions which surround the Antarctic and converting it into a fixed topographical territory, the Miskatonic expedition reveals these myths to be another form of geographical truth. During the final stage of the voyage which originally transports the explorers to the site of their intended base, Dyer is struck for the

¹³⁴ Stephen J. Pyne, *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 2003), p 192.

¹³⁵ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 223.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, p 225.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*.

¹³⁸ Lovecraft makes reference to Smith’s Commoriom and Uzuldaroum, *Ibid*.

¹³⁹ Howard’s Valusia is also mentioned by Lovecraft, *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁰ *Space and Place*, p 99.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*.

first time by the similarity between the looming range of desolate summits he observes and the “disturbing descriptions of the evilly fabled plateau of Leng”¹⁴² he has read in the *Necronomicon*. Only later does he realise that the uncanny similarity between the uplands of this “untrodden and unfathomed austral world”¹⁴³ and Leng is no coincidence. As Dyer now reluctantly recognises, the “primal writings”¹⁴⁴ which mention this dreaded plateau are not just texts to be studied by folklorists. In actuality, they are an ancient record of those places which mankind must avoid.

If Dyer has uncovered the terrible identity of this section of Antarctica’s geography, then it becomes clearer why *Mountains of Madness* must be regarded as a highly important text in the overall development in Lovecraft’s representation of landscapes. Leng was first mentioned in his work in the tale ‘Celephaïs’ (1920), where it is described as a “cold desert plateau”¹⁴⁵ which fleetingly appears in the drug-induced dreams of the protagonist. In ‘The Hound’ (1924) it is briefly referred to as an inaccessible place obscurely connected to Central Asia¹⁴⁶ but again it could as easily be the creation of the crazed narrator’s morbid imagination, while in ‘The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath’ (1926) it is part of the transcendental dimension Randolph Carter journeys through.¹⁴⁷

In *Mountains of Madness*, Dyer is prepared to believe that Leng may once have been an actual geographic territory which became imprinted upon “the racial memory of man – or of his predecessors”,¹⁴⁸ but he remains sceptical that it might still exist somewhere. Nonetheless, he has learned enough about it to state that “wherever in space or

¹⁴² H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p 186.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p 208.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘Celephaïs’, in S.T. Joshi ed. *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 1999), p 28.

¹⁴⁶ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘The Hound’ in Ibid, p 84.

¹⁴⁷ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath’, in S.T. Joshi ed. *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 2005), p 192.

¹⁴⁸ H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p 208.

time it might brood”¹⁴⁹ it is “not a region I would care to be in or near”.¹⁵⁰ By the novel’s conclusion, Dyer’s worst suspicions about Leng have not only been confirmed but it is evident that the Miskatonic expedition has unknowingly stumbled upon the very location of this realm “which even the mad author of the *Necronomicon* was reluctant to discuss”.¹⁵¹ In this manner, it can be observed that by the time Lovecraft wrote *Mountains of Madness* he was concerned with giving substance to those key places in his fictional universe which he had previously depicted only in an oblique, ethereal fashion, and that he had found a final home for his “nightmare plateau”¹⁵² at the centre of the South Polar Regions.

Along with giving his own imaginary realms new meaning by situating them within its enormous unseen spaces, Lovecraft also uses the Antarctic landscape to oppose the notion that nothing unexpected will arise from mankind’s investigations into the ancient past. The following section shall demonstrate how the Gothic horror of *Mountains of Madness* results from its distortion of traditional concepts of time, but it must be noted here that the novel’s reconfigurations of normal temporal order are made credible by the parallels which Lovecraft establishes between the unexplored areas of the far south and those places where the remains of advanced civilizations had stayed hidden for centuries. In addition to providing the reader with a sense of the huge scale of the Miskatonic expedition’s discoveries in Antarctica, Lovecraft’s allusions to Machu Picchu and Kish in particular also enable him to convey the startling combination of extreme antiquity and extraordinary sophistication which characterises this “monstrous lair of elder secrets”.¹⁵³

Although rumours of their existence had persisted for centuries, the exact locations of Machu Picchu and Kish remained unknown to the outside world until the early

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p 249.

¹⁵² Ibid, p 248.

¹⁵³ Ibid, p 233.

decades of the 20th century.¹⁵⁴ Within a relatively brief time these ancient sites were extricated from the domain of myth, and were shown to have once been places of the highest importance for the powerful civilizations who built them. Their excavation proved that rich forms of culture had flourished and impressive levels of technical ability had been reached, before the inhabitants of these cities allowed them to fall into dereliction and eventually abandoned them. Since American explorers and archaeologists played pivotal roles in the rediscovery of both Machu Picchu and Kish,¹⁵⁵ it is probable that Lovecraft's readers would have already been aware of how the historical reality of these fabled sites had recently been uncovered. If structures as massive as these had lain forgotten in distant areas of South America and Asia, this added a layer of historical plausibility to Lovecraft's representation of a fictional ancient world hidden within the gigantic, untraversed spaces of the Antarctic landscape.

Of all the remote regions Lovecraft alludes to in the novel, none contributes more to the concept of the far southern landscape as a realm of mystery than his references to the geography of the Tibetan Plateau. Writing on the history of the depiction of Tibet in western culture, Colin Thubron has observed that, much like the distant lands of Antarctica, the region was consistently represented as "an inaccessible otherworld".¹⁵⁶ A place isolated "beyond the greatest mountain barrier on earth, in plateaux of cold purity",¹⁵⁷ he explains that it came to be thought of as "a land forbidden to intruders not by human agency but by some mystical interdiction".¹⁵⁸ Viewed as the last refuge of a strange and decadent alien culture, he writes that in the Victorian imagination Tibet was

¹⁵⁴ Simone Waisbard, 'The Last Refuge of the Incas', and Henri-Paul Eydoux, 'The Men Who Built the Tower of Babel' in Waisbard and Eydoux ed. *The World's Last Mysteries* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977), p 155-165, p 169-179.

¹⁵⁵ Machu Picchu was located by Hiram Bingham III (1875-1956), a Yale University historian, in 1911. The first major excavations of Kish were conducted from 1923-29 by a team from the Field Museum led by the American-born archaeologist Stephen Herbert Langdon (1876-1937).

¹⁵⁶ Colin Thubron, *To a Mountain in Tibet* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011), p 30.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

transformed into “a laboratory of occult miracles, where the paranormal was studied as a science”,¹⁵⁹ a perception which inevitably found its way into the fiction of the era.¹⁶⁰

However, in the later period in which Lovecraft composed *Mountains of Madness*, only one part of Tibet’s geography remained anything like as intriguingly ambiguous as the Antarctic interior: the titanic mountain range of the Himalayas. Bill Manhire has observed that by the start of the twentieth century the central terrains of Antarctica and the snow-capped valleys and soaring peaks of the Himalayas constituted the last places on the globe which could still be the subject of what he terms “adventurous speculation”.¹⁶¹ He contends that both maintained a persistent hold on the imaginations of fiction writers because they “offered a generous, flexible location – geographically beyond reproach, but still sufficiently uncharted to be able to host any number of narrative surprises”.¹⁶² As noted above, Lovecraft had originally linked the dreaded plateau of Leng with the isolated parts of Central Asia. Although he re-locates it to the far south in the *Mountains of Madness*, Lovecraft’s narrative still partakes of the sense of wonder which continued to surround the other great unexplored space on the Earth’s surface.

Indeed, artistic renditions of the Himalayas may well have been among the primary inspirations of Lovecraft’s novel. He viewed the paintings of Nicholas Roerich, a

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, p 31.

¹⁶⁰ As Thubron notes, one of the most famous representations of Tibet of this kind in Victorian popular literature is found in ‘The Adventure of the Empty House’ (1903), first collected in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905). Conan Doyle’s great detective reveals that after fabricating his demise following in his final confrontation with his arch nemesis Professor Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls he travelled to the region, and there spent two years seeking enlightenment disguised as a Norwegian explorer, eventually gaining entry to the city of Lhasa. Even before this, the overarching plot of the *Dr. Nikola* sequence (*A Bid for Fortune: or, Dr. Nikola’s Vendetta* (1895), *Dr. Nikola* (1896), *The Lust of Hate* (1898), *Dr. Nikola’s Experiment* (1899) and “*Farewell, Nikola*” (1901)) by Guy Boothby (1867-1905), had involved the master criminal and occultist’s attempts to infiltrate a Tibetan monastery and obtain a secret power to revive the dead and unnaturally extend his own life. The Tibetan Plateau continued to be a setting for imaginary narratives well into the 20th century and beyond. *Lost Horizon* (1933), by the British author James Hilton (1900-1954), depicted it as the home of Shangri-La, a fabled harmonious valley located in the western end of the Kunlun Mountains. In 2016 Michelle Paver (1960-) followed up her critically lauded polar Gothic novel *Dark Matter* (2010) with *Thin Air*, a tale of high-altitude supernatural horror surrounding an expedition to climb Kangchenjunga, the highest mountain in India, the second highest peak in the Himalayas, and the third highest summit on Earth.

¹⁶¹ Bill Manhire, *The Wide White Page: Writers Imagine Antarctica* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2004), p 12.

¹⁶² Ibid.

Russian mystic, author and artist who spent several years living in the Kullu Valley, in May 1930, shortly before Byrd returned from the far south and nine months before beginning work on *Mountains of Madness*. Roerich had produced a series of monumental Himalayan views, works notable for their unearthly colours and their depiction of these mountains as a timeless realm spectacularly elevated above the rest of the Earth's surface (Fig. 47, 48).



Fig. 47: Nicholas Roerich, *Himalayas* 1933



Fig. 48: Nicholas Roerich, *Himalayas* 1929

Lovecraft later wrote that he had been much impressed by Roerich's unusual "handling of perspective and atmosphere which to me, suggests other dimensions and alien orders of being – or at least, the gateways leading to such".¹⁶³ He deemed the painter to be "one of those rare and fantastic souls who have glimpsed the grotesque, terrible secrets outside space & beyond time, & who have retained some ability to hint at the marvels they have seen".¹⁶⁴ As a result, the uncanny sensibility pervading Lovecraft's Antarctic landscape must be seen as deriving from his attempt to find a literary equivalent for Roerich's visual technique.

While it will shortly be shown how *Mountains of Madness* incorporates authentic features of Antarctic topography, Roerich's Himalayan views were undoubtedly Lovecraft's main reference point in his depiction of the continental interior. He cites them

¹⁶³ H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters V: 1934-37* ed. August Derleth and James Turner (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1976), p 436.

¹⁶⁴ H.P. Lovecraft, Letter to Lillian D. Clark, May 21-22, 1930, Cited in S.T. Joshi ed. *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 2001), p 424, N. 17.

no less than six times,¹⁶⁵ and, as Waugh contends, Lovecraft's overt acknowledgement of their influence is proof that he "regarded Roerich's Tibet...as an authentic introduction to the world of Antarctica".¹⁶⁶ Dyer immediately notes a similarity between Roerich's works and the far southern landscape when the expedition first moves inland, recording a line of barren peaks which "loomed up constantly against the west as the low northern sun of noon or the still lower horizon-grazing sun of midnight poured its hazy reddish rays over the white snow, bluish ice and water lanes, and black bits of exposed granite slope".¹⁶⁷ For Dyer, these regions already comprehensively charted by Scott, Amundsen and Shackleton still appear so unusual that they call to mind Roerich's "strange and disturbing Asian paintings".¹⁶⁸ However, the landscape which lies ahead resembles these scenes so exactly that it becomes entirely indistinguishable from Roerich's artistic visions.

Seeking to capture the otherworldliness of Roerich's Himalayan aesthetic, Lovecraft's descriptions of the inner Antarctic possess an analogous hallucinatory quality. When Lake originally reports the mountains crowning the frozen plateau, he has difficulty expressing "the ineffable majesty of the whole scene, and the queer state of his sensations at being in the lee of vast, silent pinnacles, whose ranks shot up like a wall reaching the sky at the world's rim".¹⁶⁹ If this imagery reflects that of Roerich's paintings, Dyer's subsequent description of these looming peaks matches it even more closely. Observed in "the reddish antarctic light against the provocative background of iridescent ice-dust clouds",¹⁷⁰ these summits appear to him "like the pylons to a frightful gateway into forbidden spheres of dream, and complex gulfs of remote time, space, and

¹⁶⁵ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 186, 193, 208, 218, 219, 281.

¹⁶⁶ Robert H. Waugh, 'Looming at the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraft's Mirages' in David Simmons ed. *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p 93.

¹⁶⁷ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 185-186.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p186.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p 194.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p 207.

ultradimensionality”.¹⁷¹ The geologist has already concluded that this is a land which gives rise to a feeling of “adventurous expectancy”,¹⁷² a sense that there is far more to be found here than just geographical knowledge. The uncanny sight of this enormous mountain range only confirms this notion.

Consequently, it can be perceived that Lovecraft appropriated Roerich’s Himalayan imagery not simply for aesthetic purposes but to create an impression of the Antarctic interior as a site which also possesses some variety of esoteric meaning. By repeatedly evoking the mystical significance of the Tibetan landscape, Lovecraft’s reinforces the idea of the Antarctic as a realm imbued with similar “ineffable suggestions of a vague, ethereal beyondness far more than terrestrially spatial”,¹⁷³ but of a much higher order. Furthermore, Lovecraft’s deliberate linking of the geographical space of the far south with the most remote region of the Eastern world serves to emphasise its dualistic nature. Representing a middle ground between the fully determined places of the real world and the realms of the imagination, the geographies of the Antarctic plateau and the upper reaches of the Himalayas emerge as zones in which both of these forms of space co-exist. More than just fields of empirical knowledge or fantasies, they are landscapes which fulfil what Tuan perceives as one of the traditional functions of mythical space for they are settings “for the enactment of cosmic drama”.¹⁷⁴

In this way, Lovecraft’s allusions to the Himalayas do much more than simply add to the texture of his Antarctic landscape: they reinforce the perception of the far south as somewhere withholding vast and primal secrets. In addition, these references serve several other purposes. First of all, they permit Lovecraft to align the narrative of Antarctic discovery with the celebrated Himalayan climbing expeditions which took place in the

¹⁷¹ Ibid, p 207-208.

¹⁷² Ibid, p 190.

¹⁷³ Ibid, p 208.

¹⁷⁴ *Space and Place*, p 99.

decade preceding Byrd's first expedition, portraying them as essentially kindred endeavours arising from an obsession with penetrating the unknown. Indeed, in the years prior to the earliest attempts to scale this mighty range, one of the most notable achievements in mountaineering had been the first successful ascent of Mt. Erebus led by Prof. T.W.E. David as part of Shackleton's British Antarctic Expedition in 1908,¹⁷⁵ a feat re-enacted by the Miskatonic explorers.¹⁷⁶

Like the exploration of the Antarctic Plateau, the project of finally conquering the Himalayas advanced rapidly at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, it was not until 1921 that the British Reconnaissance Expedition produced the first maps of the Nepalese territory encompassing Everest, the mountain which became as central to this field of activity as the South Pole had been in the arena of Antarctic exploration. Three years later, George Mallory, the most famous mountaineer of the age, made his third attempt to reach the summit of Everest along with his companion Andrew 'Sandy' Irvine: both never returned. Another explorer who, like Captain Scott, was widely portrayed as a man who possessed what Wade Davis describes as a "sublime purpose",¹⁷⁷ Mallory's defeat at the hands of indomitable nature also transformed him into a supreme example of tragic heroism. As Davis writes, his disappearance was one which would come to "haunt a nation and give rise to the greatest mystery in the history of mountaineering".¹⁷⁸ It also revived the concept of the Himalayas as a territory in some way forbidden to the Western mind.

Lovecraft's allusions to the Himalayas also play a vital pragmatic role in *Mountains of Madness*. Francis Spufford has described Antarctica as "rarely a continent

¹⁷⁵ See Ernest Shackleton, *The Heart of the Antarctic* ed. Beau Riffenberg (London: Wordsworth, 2007), p 115-132, and David Day, *Antarctica: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p 137-139.

¹⁷⁶ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 187.

¹⁷⁷ Wade Davis, *Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory, and the Conquest of Everest* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011), p 2.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

that towers, rarely a place that overwhelms you with height”.¹⁷⁹ Instead, he writes that due to its sheer enormousness its sense of sublimity “lies in width, in horizontals that go on and on”.¹⁸⁰ Nonetheless, the first phase of the Heroic Age had revealed that the far southern landscape was more than just a great monotonous expanse. The journeys of Scott, Shackleton and Amundsen had shown that the continent was bisected by a natural boundary, one of the planet’s longest and most formidable mountain ranges, later given the official name of the Transantarctic Mountains. Although each of these Heroic Age expeditions crossed this range at different points in order to gain access to the Pole from the Ross Ice Shelf, the majority of it had been left unexplored. Some of the ranges of the Transantarctic Mountains (such as the Queen Maud Mountains) became strategic locations for Byrd during his first expedition. His sighting of the Rockefeller Mountains during one of his earliest flights in January 1929¹⁸¹ demonstrated that the airplane would ensure the discovery of any mountain groups still hidden away in the far reaches of this polar world.

This new vision of the Antarctic landscape as characterised not just by massive shelves of ice but also by towering peaks and imposing summits is integral to Lovecraft’s novel, for by stressing the dramatic topographical features of its outer regions he creates a plausible foundation for his own phantasmagoric, Gothicised representation of its interior realms. In its opening sections, he illustrates how the progress of Antarctic exploration was marked by the discovery of ever-more gigantic mountain ranges (extending from Mounts Erebus and Terror and the Admiralty Range discovered by James Clark Ross in the early 1840s, to the Queen Alexandra Range first charted by Shackleton in 1908, to the 13,350 ft Mount Fridtjof Nansen originally sighted by Amundsen in 1911), which the Miskatonic explorers observe as they travel further inland. However, none of these formations bears

¹⁷⁹ Francis Spufford ed. *To the Ends of the Earth: An Anthology of the Finest Writing on the Arctic and Antarctic Vol. 2: The Antarctic* (London: Granta Books, 2007), p 3.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ See *Little America*, p 122-125.

comparison with the great range which Lovecraft situates atop the Polar Plateau. Rather than describing these mountains which “surpass anything in imagination”¹⁸² in relation to those which had already been found there, Lovecraft instead uses the Himalayas as the frame of reference.

When he began writing *Mountains of Madness* in 1931, Lovecraft would almost certainly have been aware that Everest had been officially confirmed as not just the tallest unclimbed peak in the world but the highest point anywhere on the globe. Indeed, it would remain unconquered for another seventeen years after the novel’s publication, until Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay made the first successful ascent in May 1953. When Lake’s secondary expedition approaches the plateau, the biologist immediately speculates that this new mountain group may equal the Himalayas; furthermore, instead of being composed of a small number of exceptional peaks this gargantuan range “[r]eaches [as] far as can be seen to right and left”.¹⁸³ In his next report, Lake states that at more than 35,000 ft they have been found to exceed the Himalayas, a revelation which even puts “Everest out of the running”.¹⁸⁴ In this way, *Mountains of Madness* sees Lovecraft ingeniously turn the traditional depiction of the Antarctic topography on its head: the new perspective introduced by the airplane allows him to replace the image of apparently endless frozen plains with a representation of a mountain group of such awesome verticality and extent that it eventually fills the horizon to its very limit.

In place of a scene of bleak desolation, Lovecraft also portrays this range as a realm of unearthly beauty. Once again evoking the luminous colours and ethereal atmosphere of Roerich’s Himalayan paintings, Lake notes how the mountains appear “marvellous in [the] red-gold light of [the] low sun”¹⁸⁵ and resemble a “land of mystery in

¹⁸² H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p 192.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p 193.

a dream or gateway to [a] forbidden world of wonder”.¹⁸⁶ When Dyer and the others finally behold them, it is conjectured that in spite of their fantastic height “certain slopes and passes would permit of the scaling and crossing of the entire range by seasoned mountaineers”.¹⁸⁷ In other words, what Lovecraft envisages at the base of the globe is a far southern counterpart to that region which Roerich described as the “Corona Mundi – Roof of the World”.¹⁸⁸ By incorporating mountains even more colossal than the Himalayas into his imaginative polar geography, he combines the quest to chart the unseen territories of the Antarctic interior with the tantalising dream of reaching those mysterious places at the very summit of the Earth.

In *Little America*, Byrd claims that his first expedition was unlike any which had previously set out for Antarctica. Whereas the progress of earlier explorers had been impeded by extreme weather conditions, hazardous terrain, and the sheer extent of the areas they tried to traverse, what distinguished his expedition was that it was equipped with “three of the most efficient instruments ever given to the explorer; radio, the airplane, with its wonderful speed and independence of surface obstructions that vex the foot-traveller, and the aerial mapping camera, which sees everything and forgets nothing”.¹⁸⁹ Although he approached his task with great humility, Byrd wrote that with these advantages he and his men “had reason to hope we might accomplish much”.¹⁹⁰ Focusing on the continent’s uncharted Eastern territories whose thousands of square miles amounted to “perhaps the most fascinating geographical enigma yet left unsolved”,¹⁹¹ Byrd believed that these new

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, p 212.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, p 223.

¹⁸⁹ *Little America*, p 47-48.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, p 48.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, p 106.

instruments would allow him to obtain “a sight of things denied to man since the beginning of time”.¹⁹²

Lovecraft once wrote that “I have to stop dreaming about an unknown realm (such as Antarctica or Arabia Deserta) as soon as the explorers enter it”.¹⁹³ However, Byrd’s accomplishments must surely have enlarged Lovecraft’s curiosity concerning those areas even he had been unable to penetrate, since these form the setting of *Mountains of Madness*. Arriving in the South Polar Regions nine months after Byrd’s departure, the Miskatonic expedition intends to follow in his footsteps by moving eastward, a plan which is abandoned once Lake makes his discoveries. The remainder of Lovecraft’s novel takes place within those north-western territories where neither Byrd, nor anybody else, had yet ventured. Unlike the nameless city and the sunken city of R’lyeh, which only emerge at rare intervals from the sands of the Arabian Peninsula or the depths of the South Pacific, this huge unmapped portion of the continent could feasibly contain both the vast mountains and ancient ruins he envisaged. As Jason C. Eckhardt has stated, what Lovecraft’s novel required was “a place of colossal size to encompass both its physical requirements and its epic content”,¹⁹⁴ and the north-west of Antarctica was now the only location on the planet which could still provide such a space.

However, Lovecraft’s actual depiction of the Antarctic interior may have been influenced by the strange perceptual conditions which Byrd encountered. For all his confidence in new technology, Byrd quickly realised that it could do little to combat what he termed “the confounding properties of Antarctic visibility”.¹⁹⁵ Shortly after he set foot on the great ice-sheet, Byrd became aware of the numerous ways in which this scene of

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters III: 1929-31* ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1971), p 140.

¹⁹⁴ Jason C. Eckhardt, ‘Behind the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraft and the Antarctic in 1930’, *Lovecraft Studies* No. 14 (Spring 1987), p 38.

¹⁹⁵ Little America, p 89.

desolate grandeur could lead explorers astray. He was disturbed to find that in certain atmospheric conditions “the eyes became uncertain and the relative distances of objects became confused”.¹⁹⁶ He noticed that even in perfect daylight he could see ahead “only several hundred feet and inequalities on the surface took on weird shapes”.¹⁹⁷ On the very first night he slept on the continent, Byrd stepped outside of his tent only to be “impressed anew with the deceiving effect of the Antarctic on the eye”.¹⁹⁸ Regardless of what instrument he used “I could not make out the distance of things, nor their shape”.¹⁹⁹ The next day he and his men went in search of what appeared to be a distant mountain only to find that it was a tiny mound of snow close beside them, while a ridge which seemed to be immediately in front of them proved to be several miles away.²⁰⁰

Byrd later found that the same baffling ambiguities which made the Antarctic landscape so disorientating could not be escaped even in the skies above it. His intention was to begin making an exact photographic record of all of those territories he flew over, but no sooner had his aircraft ascended than Byrd found his aerial view obscured by a “vagueness wrought by the effect of light on snow”,²⁰¹ which made altitude difficult to judge. To his amazement he saw that “[i]nstead of a horizon there was a curious dappled effect”,²⁰² and was alarmed by vast cloud formations which at first glance “appeared to be high land”.²⁰³ Although Byrd had estimated that he would be able to chart new land at an unprecedented rate of 4,000 square miles per hour,²⁰⁴ he spent most of his early flights observing a scene which only alternated from “a gray indefiniteness”²⁰⁵ to “a milky,

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, p 80.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p 89.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, p 90.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid, p 103.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid, p 104.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, p 121.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, p 123.

trembling nothingness”²⁰⁶ and trying not to panic at the thought that the aircraft could be plummeting downward. In his words, these perplexing conditions of visibility were proof of “how fiercely East Antarctica guarded its secret”.²⁰⁷

Waugh has made a fascinating study of Lovecraft’s use of polar mirages as a means to destabilise the concepts of the real and the imaginary in *Mountains of Madness*, an essay which shall be especially relevant in section four.²⁰⁸ However, it can be argued that Byrd’s accounts of these optical illusions were also intrinsic to Lovecraft’s representation of the landscape of inner Antarctica. When Dyer’s plane climbs upwards into the higher regions of the north-west, the geologist is terrified by the sheer magnitude of what exists there. The “incredible, unhuman, massiveness”²⁰⁹ of the forms he beholds so far exceeds what his mind can encompass, that Dyer admits that “the sway of reason seemed irrefutably shaken”.²¹⁰ After closely surveying it for fifty miles, he writes that “[t]here seemed to be no limit to the mountain range, or to the length of the frightful stone city which bordered its inner foothills”.²¹¹ Even when he begins exploring it on foot, Dyer states that “[o]nly in fantastic nightmares could any human beings but Danforth and me conceive such optical effects”.²¹² In this way, it is a Gothic realm which his intellect is not equipped to fathom, a landscape in which human beings have no natural place.

Therefore, if Byrd discovered Antarctica to be a continent where all notions of scale, perspective and even dimension became completely unreliable then the abnormal magnitude of the phenomena of Lovecraft’s polar plateau can be seen as having its basis in the uncanny spatial distortions produced by these forms of ambiguity. As Francis Spufford has written, in constructing his Antarctic landscape Lovecraft “expands the Transantarctic

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid, p 106.

²⁰⁸ *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft*, p 91-105.

²⁰⁹ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 223.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid, p 226.

²¹² Ibid, p 228-229.

Range into something truly outsized, a fit location for another of the secrets which – as ever in Lovecraft – make the sanity of the beholder snap like over-stretched elastic”.²¹³ Now that air transportation had promised to eliminate the staggering distances and fearful heights which made the continent so difficult to explore, Lovecraft responds to this by depicting a land of such grotesquely exaggerated proportions that humans come to appear as both microscopically small and pitifully vulnerable.

To conclude this section, it is clear that Lovecraft’s far southern landscape marks a major development in the Antarctic Gothic genre. Neither an abyss of whiteness suffused with metaphysical suggestiveness like Poe’s or a geographical zone kept forever indeterminate by fog and optical trickery like Verne’s, Lovecraft’s polar setting is one whose astonishing features are all too fantastically visible. Now that the South Pole had been reached, *Mountains of Madness* sees Lovecraft reduce the spaces and distances this feat had involved to insignificance when compared to those which must be overcome in order to explore the realms beyond it. However, instead of presenting the Antarctic as what Spufford terms an “enormous stage”²¹⁴ where the images of heroic adventurers could grow in size “to match the giant scale of the landscape”²¹⁵ as in actual exploration accounts, in his novel Lovecraft uses it to diminish them to the point where they mean almost nothing.

In the closing paragraphs of *Mountains of Madness*, Lovecraft describes a final feature of the Antarctic landscape. This is the greater, even more sinister range of mountains discovered by the Miskatonic expedition. Reaching to a height which is “tremendous beyond all comparison”,²¹⁶ Dyer states that it resembles “the serrated edge of a monstrous alien planet about to rise into unaccustomed heavens”²¹⁷ and occupies a “tenuous atmospheric strata peopled only by such gaseous wraiths as rash flyers have

²¹³ *To the Ends of the Earth* Vol. 2, p 155.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 4.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*.

²¹⁶ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 281.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*.

barely lived to whisper of after unexplainable falls”,²¹⁸ an image which has been interpreted as a possible allusion to Arthur Conan Doyle’s short story ‘The Horror of the Heights’ (1913).²¹⁹ As in this earlier Gothic tale, Lovecraft’s Antarctic novel depicts the previously unknown areas of the stratosphere as spaces to be feared. Far from banishing its remaining mysteries, this form of high-altitude exploration has revealed that even what Lovecraft once described as the “deep skyey voids”²²⁰ above this polar land are realms of terror.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Joshi makes this argument in *The Thing on the Doorstep*, p 436-437, N. 108. It’s certain that Lovecraft had read at least some of Conan Doyle’s Gothic tales, for he briefly mentions them in *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, p81.

²²⁰ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘The Colour out of Space’ in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 55.

Section 3: “...Disordered Time and Alien Natural Law...”:²²¹ Temporal Distortion, Unnatural History and the Fallen City in *At the Mountains of Madness*

One of the many texts which informed Lovecraft’s conception of Antarctica was *The Frozen Pirate* (1887), a novel written by the prolific American author of nautical adventure and horror stories William Clark Russell.²²² It features a shipwreck survivor who drifts below the Antarctic Circle, where he stumbles upon a ship which has remained entombed within an iceberg for half a century. The young sailor is then terrified when he revives the vessel’s pirate crew from their icy slumber. While Russell’s novel was a work of simple escapism, it is noteworthy that one of the earliest Antarctic fictions Lovecraft read depicted it as a Gothic domain where the natural order of reality was overthrown and the seemingly dead could return to life. Even after he became knowledgeable about the history of far southern exploration, this notion of Antarctica as a place where time was suspended or could undergo strange transformations remained central to Lovecraft’s imaginative vision of the continent.

What is clear from *At the Mountains of Madness* is that Lovecraft’s perception of the far south also became bound-up with the concept of geological time, the reality that the Earth was not merely a few million years old but had in fact existed for billions of years. Just as it had been proven that there were countless galaxies outside of our solar system and that underlying the material world was a realm of subatomic particles, the discovery of the Earth’s extreme age gave rise to a much broader conception of time. Byrd’s first expedition contributed to this process; by collecting samples of those exceptionally old Antarctic rocks, Byrd’s scientific advisor Isaiah Bowman stated that the expedition would

²²¹ H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* in Roger Luckhurst ed. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p 239.

²²² See S.T. Joshi, *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H.P. Lovecraft in His Time* (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2001), p 38, and China Miéville, Introduction to H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), p xvii.

do more than just demonstrate what “higher forms of life”²²³ had flourished during its earlier epochs. Instead, Bowman claimed that it would provide a precise image of “the background of man himself”²²⁴ by representing the grand time scale of geologic events.

While Bowman and Byrd’s geologist Laurence Gould believed that this knowledge would enable science to construct a perfect linear narrative charting the development of the Earth from its very origins, in *Mountains of Madness* Lovecraft casts doubt upon this concept. The Miskatonic explorers similarly intend to extract the specimens which will enable them to recreate Antarctica’s primordial history, but instead they receive a vision of “an elder and utterly alien earth”²²⁵ totally incompatible with the established view of the planet’s past. When Dyer later enters the great city, time begins to assume still stranger and more disturbing forms. The “primary nucleus and centre of some archaic and unbelievable chapter of Earth’s history”,²²⁶ this city is a Gothic site where Lovecraft destabilises the normal chronological order and produces some of the novel’s most powerful instances of terror.

This section shall analyze Lovecraft’s manipulations of time in *Mountains of Madness*. It will begin by examining how he uses the vision of Antarctica as a place of “appalling antiquity”²²⁷ to challenge the view that the development of human beings marked a singular event in the Earth’s history. By revealing that the far south was colonised thousands of millennia before *Homo sapiens* even evolved, Lovecraft’s expanded conception of time radically undermines mankind’s importance. This section will then focus on the polar city as the locus of temporal distortion in the novel. One of the defining images of his work, Lovecraft had already used the symbol of an enormous ruined

²²³ Isaiah Bowman, ‘Antarctica’ in *The Scientific Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (April 1930), p 344.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 222.

²²⁶ Ibid, p 225.

²²⁷ Ibid, p 237.

city to suggest the unknowable nature of the distant past, but in his Antarctic Gothic fiction it has a more complex function.

As this section shall demonstrate, the polar city is a fantastical structure which reflects Lovecraft's disorientating permutations of temporality, most notably in his use of non-Euclidean spaces. It will then be analyzed in light of the work of Oswald Spengler, whose notions of decadence and the cyclical nature of history were a key influence on *Mountains of Madness*. This section shall then consider how Lovecraft's depiction of the city may have also been shaped by the pivotal period he spent living in New York, a modern metropolis he initially found impressive but quickly grew to despise. After briefly assessing Lovecraft's portrayal of New York as a Gothic space in his earlier stories, this section will conclude by examining the connections between these representations and the dead city of *Mountains of Madness*.

Yi-Fu Tuan has observed that mankind's perception of the world is determined as much by its awareness of time as its awareness of space, and these categories are so inextricably linked that they are often regarded "as transposable measures of the same experience".²²⁸ Space only appears intelligible to human beings because it possesses a temporal dimension, but Tuan holds that people "differ in their awareness of space and time and in the way they elaborate a spatio-temporal world".²²⁹ Although in western cultures time is characterised as having a constant forward linear movement, the fact that an individual's perception of it is greatly influenced by the environments they inhabit makes their experience of time unique. However, since most humans rarely stray beyond their familiar surroundings, Tuan observes that it is in situations where they confront the unknown that the concepts of space and time "rise to the surface of consciousness".²³⁰ For

²²⁸ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p 119.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid, p 127.

this reason, he proposes that explorers experience more dramatic shifts between different modes of time than most human beings.

Using the example of those nineteenth century Europeans who “searched for the source of the Nile in Africa and for signs of ancient civilization in the interior of Asia”,²³¹ Tuan states that for these figures exploration was much “like visiting a historic city or museum in which every object reminded the visitor of a remote past”.²³² In these places time seemed to have stood still for thousands of years, and even though some of these explorers discovered completely new lands he notes that the “[n]arratives of their journeys give the impression of odysseys into the past rather than into the future”.²³³ Conversely, those pioneers who settled different areas of North America during the same period believed they were heading “into a spacious future”.²³⁴ Therefore, Tuan holds that explorers could find themselves either “plunging into the past”²³⁵ or “thrust into virgin territory”²³⁶ depending on the sense of temporal depth they experienced in different geographical locations.

In this respect, the Antarctica which Richard E. Byrd presented to his readers was an anomaly, for it was a land which did not fully conform to either of these perceptions. In *Little America*, he described it as the single largest unclaimed territory on Earth, the planet’s only polar continent whose very existence had been “definitely proved only ninety years ago, and [which] had been under intensive investigation for only thirty years”.²³⁷ It was a new world which had never known human habitation, and whose colonisation had only begun. However, Byrd also presented the far south from another perspective.

²³¹ Ibid, p 125.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid, p 126.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Richard E. Byrd, *Little America: Aerial Exploration in the Antarctic, The Flight to the South Pole* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1930), p 40.

According to this, Antarctica was “a continent still in the ice age”²³⁸ and a portal to the furthest reaches of the Earth’s geologic past.

In *Mountains of Madness*, Lovecraft exploits Antarctica’s anomalousness to interrogate the concept of history. Just as Tuan maintained that the experience of time is not universal but varies according to location, Lovecraft suggests that history itself is merely a construct which allows us to mask the immense scope of cosmic time. Early on Dyer confirms that Antarctica “was once temperate, and even tropical, with a teeming vegetable and animal life”,²³⁹ and he refers to the multitude of earlier geologic time periods and the species which flourished during them. Lovecraft then emphasises just how long organic life has existed on Earth by noting that in the period before it emerged the planet’s land masses were still in the process of forming (according to the recently proposed theory of continental drift), and it had (as another, later discredited, theory claimed) only recently acquired its moon after a huge quantity of its matter was dragged into space.²⁴⁰

In the same way that Byrd’s expedition sought the planet’s oldest rocks in order to establish the facts about the Earth’s origins, the Miskatonic expedition’s closely-related objective is to chart the development of organic life from its inception. When the expedition blasts open the cavern, this “new-found gateway to secrets of inner earth and vanished aeons”²⁴¹ promises to provide the perfect record of evolutionary history it has been searching for. However, the perplexing abundance of extremely ancient fossils in the cavern suggests that “there had been a remarkable and unique degree of continuity between the life of over three hundred million years ago and that of only thirty million years

²³⁸ Ibid, p 46.

²³⁹ H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p 183.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, p 244.

²⁴¹ Ibid, p 196.

ago”.²⁴² The reality of Antarctica’s past does not match the explorer’s preconceptions, an indication that the accepted narrative of the Earth’s history is unreliable.

Although Gould’s geological survey was evidently the model for the Miskatonic expedition’s drilling operation, the cavern which is the source of many of Lovecraft’s revelations concerning time may also have had a real-life counterpart. In envisaging this formation, it is possible that Lovecraft had in mind the Burgess Shale, a fossil bed in the Canadian Rockies discovered by Charles Walcott in 1909. This site contained one of the largest deposits of fossils ever recorded, and the collection Walcott amassed was exceptional both in terms of the quantity of unrecorded specimens and also the quality of their preservation. The Burgess Shale provided a remarkable glimpse of the Earth’s biological life from as far back as 500 million years, and revealed that it had been infinitely more varied and unusual than natural historians had previously assumed.²⁴³ The excavations at the Burgess Shale attracted much international attention, and Lovecraft may have become aware of them either through his own scientific studies or as a result of the excursions he made to Quebec between 1930 and 1931, the period immediately prior to the composition of *Mountains of Madness*. The strange creatures he describes in the novel certainly bear a similarity to some of the more exotic fossils Walcott unearthed [Fig. 49, 50, 51].

²⁴² Ibid, p 197.

²⁴³ For a detailed account of the excavation of the Burgess Shale and its ramifications for natural history see Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (New York: W.H. Norton, 1989).



Fig. 49: Fossilized creature, photograph by Charles Walcott



**Fig. 50, 51: Original illustrations of the Old Ones, *At the Mountains of Madness*,
Astounding Stories, February 1936**

When the petrified cadavers of the Old Ones are located far deeper within the cavern than the fossils of the most basic organisms, established history is proven even more erroneous. Lovecraft's explorers face the baffling reality that this unknown species "could have undergone its tremendously complex evolution on a new-born earth in time to

leave prints in archaean rocks”.²⁴⁴ From beneath the bleak surface of this region, they have paradoxically unearthed entities so advanced that modern biology can only speculate as to how they functioned. Perfectly adapted to survive in the harsh polar climate, capable of producing exquisite artworks and accomplishing the most staggering feats of construction, Lovecraft depicts these creatures as unquestionably superior to human beings. Possessors of a five-lobed brain, they were probably endowed with more than five senses, a conjecture which suddenly makes the mighty human race appear as relatively unsophisticated as molluscs or crustaceans.

Along with the Gothic spaces of the cavern and the great city, the seemingly impossible combination of incredible refinement and extreme archaism embodied in the Old One’s physiology is another of the primary manifestations of disordered time in *Mountains of Madness*. All the explorers expect to observe is the minute adaptation of simple life-forms like crinoids and trilobites. However, just as the Burgess Shale had demonstrated the astonishing diversity and complexity of living things in even the most remote geological ages, these bizarre creatures are verification that the Earth “has seen [a] whole cycle or cycles of organic life before [the] known one that begins with Archaeozoic cells”.²⁴⁵ Now that the true extent of the planet’s temporal depth has been revealed, Lovecraft makes it seem only a matter of moments since *Homo sapiens* “shambled out of apedom”,²⁴⁶ and only a few more until they are snuffed out of existence.

The epic narrative of the Old One’s migration through space, their colonisation of Earth and the creation and destruction of their magnificent civilization as told through their murals makes the history of mankind seem utterly ephemeral. If the lifespan of the human race already appeared trivially brief in light of the vast extent of geological time, it seems even more so when compared to that of a species which originated on ancient worlds

²⁴⁴ H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p 204.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, p 198.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, p 225.

outside of this galaxy. In this way, Lovecraft displaces humanity from its position of prominence and, in the words of Terry Heller, pushes it “into an even smaller, even less important, even more fragile corner of the cosmic drama”.²⁴⁷ Reduced from active protagonists to mere horror-struck observers, the isolation of the explorers amidst the endless Antarctic wastes becomes one of Lovecraft’s most powerful symbols for mankind’s insignificance when measured against the indifferent immensity of cosmic time.

If the discovery of the Old Ones and their city is proof that the accepted account of life on Earth is totally mistaken, what could have brought about this error? Tuan has written that the idea of returning to what he calls a chronological “starting point and beginning”²⁴⁸ has proven quintessential to human thought. He notes that the unmapped territories at the centres of different continents were traditionally thought of as places at the very core of historical time, and expeditions to them were depicted as symbolic journeys “to the birthplace of mankind”.²⁴⁹ In this way, humanity’s predilection for considering time purely in relation to its own existence has caused it to perceive its development as the most significant event in the Earth’s history. Therefore, in *Mountains of Madness* Lovecraft uses the extreme antiquity of the Antarctic to reveal the myopic and conceited nature of the human race’s obsession with its own origins. Not only will the expedition’s discoveries “mean to biology what Einstein has meant to mathematics and physics”,²⁵⁰ they shall abolish the idea that the enormous incremental movement of evolutionary time has somehow culminated with the appearance of man.

The unfamiliar temporal perspective which Lovecraft represents in *Mountains of Madness* was one whose implications were so vast that actual scientists were still grappling with them when the work was first published. The paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould has

²⁴⁷ Terry Heller, *The Delights of Terror: An Aesthetics of the Tale of Terror* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p 50.

²⁴⁸ *Space and Place*, p 126.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 198.

argued that along with Galilean heliocentrism and Darwinian evolution, mankind has only gradually come to recognise the “great temporal limitation imposed by geology upon human importance”.²⁵¹ He writes that it was not until the early decades of the twentieth century that “the traditional concept of a young earth, ruled by human will within days of its creation”²⁵² began to be eclipsed by “the notion of an almost incomprehensible immensity, with human habitation restricted to a millimicrosecond at the end”.²⁵³ Indeed, ‘deep time’, the first adequate term for this new expanded timescale, was not developed until fifty years after Lovecraft completed *Mountains of Madness*.²⁵⁴ However, Gould notes that the worldview produced by this notion of time remains “so alien that we can really only comprehend it as a metaphor”.²⁵⁵

Consequently, Lovecraft’s subversion of historical time can be read as an attempt to reveal the superficiality of our anthropocentric perspective. Describing the artistic principles underlying his tales, Lovecraft wrote that a sense of what he called ‘externality’ was essential. When viewed from an external position, he explained that “common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity in the vast cosmos-at-large”.²⁵⁶ To write this kind of fiction the author had to “forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind have any existence at all”.²⁵⁷ In this way, *Mountains of Madness* transforms from being an account of the Miskatonic catastrophe to a description of the rise and fall of the Old Ones, a race which perceives time completely differently to humanity and whose history spans aeons.

²⁵¹ Stephen Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), p 1-2.

²⁵² Ibid, p 2.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ It was invented by John McPhee, and first appeared in his book *Basin and Range* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1981).

²⁵⁵ *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle*, p 3.

²⁵⁶ H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters Vol. 2: 1925-1929*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City Wisconsin: Arkham House Publishers, 1968), p 150.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

The discovery of the Old Ones means that natural history must be entirely rewritten, but it soon emerges that their perfect preservation has nothing to do with fossilisation. Switching places on the dissection table with the men who put them there, these survivors of “a world forty million years dead”²⁵⁸ butcher the explorers in an effort to analyze *their* anatomy. If human beings can fall victims to these “excessively primitive and archaic”²⁵⁹ creatures from prehistory, then time has no logical or rational order. Therefore, Lovecraft’s erasure of the distinctions between past and present, ancient and modern, living and dead in *Mountains of Madness* support Gerry Carlin and Nicola Allen’s contention that his work as a whole is preoccupied with collapsing “the notion of a fixed cosmic chronology”.²⁶⁰ They argue that in Lovecraft’s fiction geologic time “functions as a multidimensional repository of that which renders human values meaningless, exceeds all comprehension and measurement, and produces intense existential dread;”²⁶¹ it is a form of time “so deep that it negates anthropocentric time entirely”.²⁶²

The Antarctic wilderness is where time begins to destabilise in Lovecraft’s novel, but in the great polar city he proceeds to warp it beyond all recognition. Vast cities were a feature of Lovecraft’s fiction from his earliest years, and appear in such tales as ‘Polaris’ (1920), ‘The Doom that Came to Sarnath’ (1920), ‘Nyarlathotep’ (1920), ‘The Nameless City’ (1921), ‘Celephaïs’ (1922), and ‘The Temple’ (1925). In these works they are either places of fabulous splendour or mysterious, disintegrating remnants which lie hidden from modernity on the ocean floor or underneath great deserts. The existence of a city in Antarctica, a realm thought to be devoid of any intelligent life, overturns the notion mankind alone is capable of designing such things [**Fig. 52**]. A structure which, even in its

²⁵⁸ H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p 215.

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p 203.

²⁶⁰ Gerry Carlin and Nicola Allen, ‘Slime and Western Man: H.P. Lovecraft in the Time of Modernism’ in David Simmons ed. *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p 73.

²⁶¹ Ibid, p 74.

²⁶² Ibid.

ruined state, make the creations of modern civilizations seem immaterial, the Miskatonic team establishes that the city is also immeasurably older than any constructed by *Homo sapiens*.

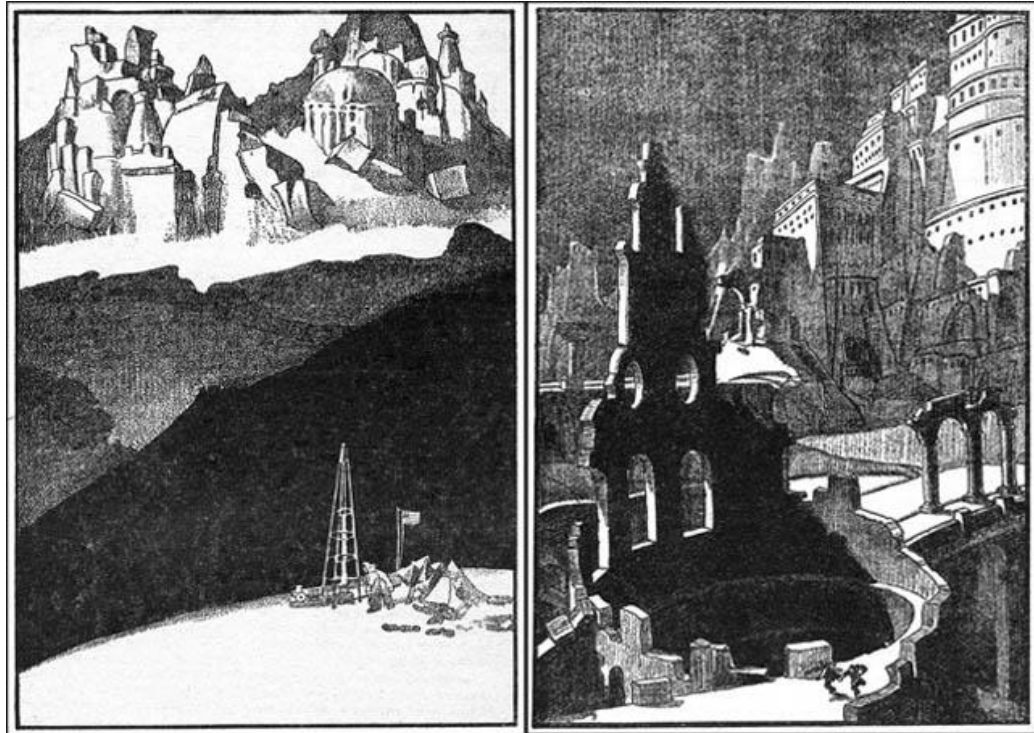


Fig. 52: Original illustrations of the Antarctic City, *At the Mountains of Madness*, *Astounding Stories*, April 1936

Indeed, this “almost endless labyrinth of colossal, regular, and geometrically eurythmic stone masses”²⁶³ is so advanced and that it scarcely conforms to the human concept of a city. As Dyer states, the very sight of it is enough to generate an impression of “some fiendish violation of known natural law”²⁶⁴ because it demonstrates that mathematics and engineering are not unique human inventions. On the contrary, it is clear that these were developed and mastered by the Old Ones hundreds of thousands of years

²⁶³ H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p 222.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, p 222.

before “this region succumbed to the present unbroken reign of glacial death”.²⁶⁵ When the explorers cross the threshold into the interior of the city, anthropocentric time ceases to have any meaning. By entering this place, they have “established an unprecedented and almost blasphemous link with forgotten aeons normally closed to our species”.²⁶⁶

Once inside this “vast dead megalopolis”,²⁶⁷ the irregular nature of time is mirrored by the city’s ever-changing structure. Since it was built by a race who viewed things on a cosmic scale, the explorers apprehend something “deeply inhuman in all the contours, dimensions, proportions, decorations, and constructional nuances” of their creation. Rather than an orderly arrangement of streets and buildings, there is only a sprawling space made up of “cones of all degrees of irregularity and truncation, terraces of every sort of provocative disproportion, shafts with odd bulbous enlargements, broken columns in curious groups, and five-pointed or five-ridged arrangements of mad grotesqueness”.²⁶⁸ This random layout forces them to mark their path using paper torn from their notebooks, a subtle symbol that our sense order is inherently artificial. Just as the entire city represents one enormous contradiction of the fundamental assumptions underpinning all human knowledge, its individual components have “geometrical forms for which a Euclid would scarcely find a name”²⁶⁹ and should not exist in our world.

While other authors had already explored the literary potential of non-Euclidean geometry,²⁷⁰ Lovecraft was the first to recognise its value for Gothic fiction in an age when science was formulating an ever-more abstract and alien conception of the universe.

²⁶⁵ Ibid, p 223.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p 228.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, p 248.

²⁶⁸ Ibid, p 229.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Even before they were popularised by the British mathematician Charles Howard Hinton (1853-1907) in his books *A New Era of Thought* (1888) and *The Fourth Dimension* (1904), a wide array of late Victorian works of fiction had made use of non-Euclidean geometry. These included such novels as Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), Edwin Abbot’s *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884), Oscar Wilde’s novella *The Canterville Ghost* (1887), and the short story ‘The Remarkable Case of Davidson’s Eyes’ (1895) by H.G. Wells.

Concerned with finding new ways to depict the encroachment of the abnormal upon the human realm, Thomas Hull holds that Lovecraft came to see that nothing could be “more unsettling to one’s sense of reality than to encounter physical examples of, say, hyperbolic geometry transplanted into our Euclidean world”.²⁷¹ As well as distorting the very fabric of space, the intrusion of such unnatural forms disrupts the order of time. If, as Tuan contends, reality is made coherent by our subjective experiences of time just as our sense of temporality is determined by the nature of physical space, these alien geometries expose the worldview resulting from this conceptual interconnection as merely a misleading fabrication. Humanity may be convinced that quotidian reality is an accurate reflection of what truly exists, but Lovecraft’s non-Euclidean geometries are a horrifying sign that we are trapped in a universe without any definite spatio-temporal structure, only that which we arbitrarily impose upon it.

In *Mountains of Madness*, the non-Euclidean spaces of the city of the Old Ones serve to highlight its paradoxical status as a structure both inconceivably ancient yet fantastically more advanced than any created by humankind. Like the primordial R’lyeh in ‘The Call of Cthulhu’(1928), another city where “all the rules of matter and perspective seemed upset”²⁷² and whose abnormal geometry permits the existence of “vast angles and stone surfaces...too great to belong to anything right or proper for this earth”,²⁷³ it is a realm of terror precisely because its juxtaposition of extreme antiquity and superhuman ingenuity is antithetical to the notion of linear time. As an author who regarded traditional literary supernaturalism as obsolete, Roger Luckhurst has written that Lovecraft “eagerly exploited the rhetoric of non-Euclidean dimensions to add conviction to his materialist

²⁷¹ Thomas Hull, ‘H.P. Lovecraft: A Horror in Higher Dimensions’, *Maths Horizons*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (February 2006), p 11.

²⁷² H.P. Lovecraft, ‘The Call of Cthulhu’ in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 49.

²⁷³ *Ibid*, p 48.

version of the Gothic”.²⁷⁴ As his Antarctic Gothic novel demonstrates, speculation about the existence of such dimensions brought with it the disturbing possibility that the anthropocentric experience of time was appallingly limited.

Although never referred to explicitly in the text, the philosophical theories of Oswald Spengler were another major influence on Lovecraft’s representations of time and the city in *Mountains of Madness*. First published in English in 1928 (the same year that Byrd departed for Antarctica), the second volume of Spengler’s highly contentious magnum opus *The Decline of the West* put forward a radically alternative interpretation of world history. Rejecting the view of human history as a progressive movement characterised by constantly increasing levels of knowledge and accomplishment, Spengler argued that the past could only be understood by focusing on individual cultures as opposed to dividing the totality of historical time into distinct epochs. Advancing the notion that all high cultures developed organically, Spengler used this idea to contradict some of the central tenets of traditional historical analysis. Above all, he claimed that civilization marked the point at which a culture’s creative intelligence was finally exhausted and overtaken by a senseless drive towards imperialist expansion.

Therefore, instead of representing the pinnacle of a culture’s existence, civilization was a phase of decadence and protracted decay. Spengler not only declared that this deterministic cyclical pattern was universal, but maintained that humanity was now witnessing the end of the western world. In overturning the conventional view of history, Spengler also transformed the meaning of the city. He wrote that when a culture lost its dynamism and became moribund “there arises the monstrous symbol and vessel of the completely emancipated intellect, the world-city, the centre in which the course of a world-

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p 457 N. 48.

history ends by winding itself up”.²⁷⁵ There was no clearer manifestation of terminal decadence than “that artificial, mathematical, utterly land-alien product of a pure intellectual satisfaction in the appropriate, the city”.²⁷⁶ In this way, the city was the stagnant culture in microcosm, for in channelling its energies into such a metropolis Spengler wrote that it “sacrifices first the blood and soul of its creators to the needs of its majestic evolution, and then the last flower of that growth to the spirit of Civilization – and so, doomed, moves on to final self-destruction”.²⁷⁷ For this reason, he argued that “*World-history is city-history*”.²⁷⁸

The disjointed episodes of the Old One’s history which Dyer and Danforth decipher from their murals conform to the temporal pattern described by Spengler. Reflecting the fragmentary nature of time within the city, Dyer explains that “no one set of carvings which we encountered told more than a fraction of any connected story, nor did we even begin to come upon the various stages of that story in their proper order”.²⁷⁹ The linear narrative he eventually pieces together demonstrates that as their city grew the Old Ones degenerated from a race whose “scientific and mechanical knowledge far surpassed man’s today”²⁸⁰ and who were “aesthetically evolved to the highest degree of civilized mastery”,²⁸¹ into beings whose “slackened energies and aspirations”²⁸² only resulted in the crudest works (which Lovecraft, disparagingly, describes as resembling those associated with modern art movements like Futurism). As the Old One’s abilities dwindled, those of their menial servants the Shoggoths increased until they finally overthrew them.

²⁷⁵ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, edited by Arthur Helps and translated by Charles Francis Atkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p 247.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p 248.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p 252.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p 247.

²⁷⁹ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 239.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p 240.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, p 234.

²⁸² *Ibid*, p 251.

As Miéville has observed, in *Mountains of Madness* Spengler's "dynamic of the city's parasitic rise and fall is rendered aesthetically".²⁸³ Also, he writes that the stark image of a magnificent but crumbling city towering above an enormous sterile wasteland is so redolent of Spengler's ideas that the text as a whole amounts to a "fantasticated representation"²⁸⁴ of his theories. In its inversion of the concepts of past and future, its reversal of the traditional motion of time, and its portrayal of civilization not as a culture's consolidation of its greatness but the harbinger of its irreversible disintegration, it is undeniable that Lovecraft's novel owes much to Spengler's pessimistic philosophy. In *Mountains of Madness*, as in Spengler's doctrine, the city is not merely symbolic of the cataclysmic deterioration of the race which created it; it is the figurative form of time itself. Just as the polar cavern is a place where evolution runs backwards, the hallucinatory architecture of Lovecraft's city is also a physical manifestation of the "disordered time and alien natural law"²⁸⁵ which exist in Antarctica.

However, Lovecraft may have begun to envisage the city as a metaphorical image for time even before he read Spengler. Lovecraft lived in New York from 1924 and 1926, and these years have been identified by a many critics as the period in which both his artistic vision and worldview reached maturity.²⁸⁶ At first captivated by the scale and grandeur of the city and determined to make it his new home, within months Lovecraft's worst fears about it were confirmed.²⁸⁷ Forced to live in the vicinity of Red Hook, the kind

²⁸³ Miéville Introduction to *At the Mountains of Madness* (2005), p xxi.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 239.

²⁸⁶ The importance of this period of Lovecraft's life is closely analysed by David E. Schultz in 'From Microcosm to Macrocosm: The Growth of Lovecraft's Cosmic Vision' in David E. Schultz and S.T. Joshi ed. *An Epicure in the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honour of H.P. Lovecraft* (Cranbury New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1991), p 199-220. Other critics who stress its influence on the development of his fiction include Jason C. Eckhardt in 'The Cosmic Yankee' in *An Epicure in the Terrible* p 78-101, Joshi in *A Dreamer and a Visionary*, Lurkhurst in his introduction to *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, and David Simmons in "'A Certain Resemblance": Abject Hybridity in H.P. Lovecraft's Short Fiction' in David Simmons ed., *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft*.

²⁸⁷ See Joshi, *A Dreamer and a Visionary*, p 186-233.

of culturally diverse slum district he had once described as an “awful cesspool”,²⁸⁸ David E. Schultz has written that it was in these years that Lovecraft became increasingly fascinated with “the survival of the ancient in modern times, decay and degeneration... [and] the relative unimportance of humans”.²⁸⁹ Between 1925 and 1926 he wrote a series of stories depicting New York not as a place of human flourishing but a loathsome and chaotic underworld, somewhere overflowing with life and yet simultaneously ruinous and depleted.

The squalid, feverish New York of ‘The Horror at Red Hook’ (1925) and ‘Cool Air’ (1926), is no more than a hive of slums on the verge of total collapse. However, the most direct foreshadowing of the Antarctic city of *Mountains of Madness* appears in ‘He’ (1925). In this tale, New York is a city whose past is a reflection of its future, and whose future reflects the past: he portrays it is a “teeming labyrinth of ancient streets that twist endlessly from forgotten courts and squares and waterfronts to courts and squares and waterfronts equally forgotten”,²⁹⁰ dominated by “Cyclopean modern towers and pinnacles that rise blackly Babylonian under waning moons”.²⁹¹ Both Lovecraft’s use of the term Cyclopean and reference to Babylon are significant, since he repeatedly describes the features of the polar city as cyclopean and draws parallels between its architecture and that of Kish, a great city once located near Babylon.

Initially astonished by New York’s “incredible peaks and pyramids”,²⁹² like the polar explorers the narrator of ‘He’ comes to detest its “noxious elephantiasis of climbing, spreading stone”,²⁹³ and feels “only a sense of horror and oppression which threatened to

²⁸⁸ H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters Vol. 1: 1911-1924*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City Wisconsin: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p 333.

²⁸⁹ David E. Schultz in ‘From Microcosm to Macrocosm: The Growth of Lovecraft’s Cosmic Vision’ in *An Epicure in the Terrible*, p 200.

²⁹⁰ H.P. Lovecraft, ‘He’ in S.T. Joshi ed., *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 1999), p 119.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid.

master, paralyse, and annihilate me”.²⁹⁴ Despite its vast population and constant activity, the narrator goes on to state that the city “is in fact quite dead, its sprawling body imperfectly embalmed and infested with queer animate things which have nothing to do with it as it was in life”.²⁹⁵ Like the polar megalopolis Lovecraft would describe six years later, for all its might and magnitude the New York of ‘He’ is only the decaying husk of a city. It is not the creation of a culture which has risen to perfection but the last, terrible creation of one which has atrophied and is on the verge of vanishing from the world.

To conclude this section, in *Mountains of Madness* the traditional concept of chronological time undergoes complete dissolution. History collapses into a single vision of eternity, as static and unchanging as the frozen Antarctic wastes. The polar city is not simply a supratemporal representation of our world, but of the entire alien cosmos. As Kurt Fawver has written, in Lovecraft’s work “the very dimension of time is an entirely psychological human construct, developed by humans, for humans, as a defence mechanism against a hostile, uncaring, ever-encroaching universe”.²⁹⁶ In this way, the terror of Lovecraft’s Antarctic explorers derives from their awareness that this precious sense of temporality has never been anything more than a deceptive product of their imaginations. Consequently, the totality of human existence emerges as something which has, in a sense, always already passed away. Like the great decaying city brooding at the centre of its desolate continent, it was doomed before its life even began.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, p 120.

²⁹⁶ Kurt Fawver, “‘Present’-ly Safe: The Anthropocentrism of Time in H.P. Lovecraft’s Fiction’, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2009), p 248.

Section 4: “That Ultimate, Nameless Thing...”.²⁹⁷ Abject Monstrosity and Liminal Terror in *At the Mountains of Madness*

At the core of Lovecraft’s dense and intricate novel, is the narrative of a terrible struggle for racial supremacy. The decimation of the once-mighty Old Ones and their civilization by their vicious and cunning slaves the Shoggoths epitomizes Lovecraft’s own conviction that the western cultural tradition was waning due to miscegenation, and what he saw as the pernicious influx of other, inferior peoples. In the Antarctic city, the polar explorers learn the truth about mankind’s beginnings and discover that there is nothing which distinguishes them from all the other creatures which have come into being and died out both on Earth and countless other planets over the aeons. Humanity’s millions of years of evolution have led it to the realisation that it merely exists by accident, and will soon suffer the same fate as the Old Ones by sinking into annihilation.

Lovecraft’s fictional universe is one in which his pathological fears about racial alterity are expressed in explicitly biological terms. Jeffrey Andrew Wienstock has written that throughout American Gothic literature “the discourse of monstrosity functions politically to facilitate or retard particular cultural agendas”.²⁹⁸ In his tales, Lovecraft uses this discourse to uphold an ideology compatible with that of the American eugenics movement, which claimed that particular physical traits were characteristic of the degeneration which was endangering the nation. Lovecraft’s white male protagonists belong exclusively to a racially pure Anglo-Saxon breed, which he depicts as under intense threat from a multitude of insidious creatures whose grotesque corporeal configurations are clearly intended to be emblematic of racial hybridity.

²⁹⁷ H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*, in Roger Luckhurst, ed., *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) p 214.

²⁹⁸ Jeffrey Andrew Wienstock, ‘American Monsters’ in Charles L. Crow ed. *A Companion to American Gothic*, (Chichester: John Wiley, 2014), p 42.

Faye Ringel is one of many critics who have argued that in his work Lovecraft projects “his own alienation and fears of racial decay upon the members of non-Aryan races”,²⁹⁹ and that his monstrosities must therefore be read as “stand-ins for stigmatized racial groups”.³⁰⁰ The aim of this section shall is to examine his representations of two contrasting forms of Otherness in *Mountains of Madness*. While in his tales Lovecraft keeps his unearthly beings deliberately vague, leaving it to the reader to imagine bodies whose absolute monstrosity transcends language, in this Antarctic Gothic novel his approach is different. It contains several extensive descriptions of the life forms which inhabit the Antarctic realm, and these are all the more uncanny due their semblance of scientific verisimilitude. Lovecraft’s precisely detailed representations of these devastatingly strange creatures reach their limit when the explorers confront the Shoggoth, a thing so utterly monstrous that Dyer struggles to accept its existence even as he attempts to describe it.

However, the text is also haunted by another form of Otherness, one even more nebulous than those indistinct beings of Lovecraft’s earlier tales. Throughout the novel Lovecraft indicates that the Antarctic is the lair of a still greater monstrosity, an unknown horror which the Old Ones themselves were fearful of disturbing. The exact nature of this dreadful phenomenon (which Lovecraft situates in the western peaks beyond the range which conceals the city of the Old Ones) is never revealed, but Lovecraft uses a variety of techniques to insinuate that it is something whose very existence is a transgression of the fundamental laws of reality. He reinforces this suggestion late in the novel, when the luckless Danforth momentarily catches sight of it and is driven insane. The fact that he cannot say what he saw is sufficient to convince Dyer that mankind is fortunate to have

²⁹⁹ Faye Ringel, ‘I Am Providence: H.P. Lovecraft’ in *A Companion to the American Gothic*, p 271.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, p 272.

never intruded upon this place before, and that it must follow the example of the Old Ones by shunning it.

The culminating moments of the entire text, the direct depiction of the Shoggoth and the oblique, non-revelation of Antarctica's final, indescribable horror prove to the explorers that it is not the dead world they assumed but one which still belongs to a completely different order of life-forms. However, these otherworldly encounters must also be read in light of Lovecraft's specific intention to create representations of cosmic terror. Both of these forms of horror, an organism which constitutes a gross aberration of the most basic principles of biology and a phenomenon so anomalous that it can crush a rational intellect, demonstrate that humanity's modern scientific viewpoint is no more than a reassuring fantasy. They are devices for conveying what Ringel regards as one of the dominant themes of Lovecraft's fiction: the idea that the world we inhabit, and the wider universe, are places "inimical to man".³⁰¹

Using the concepts of abjection and liminality, this section will analyze these forms of horror and their pivotal functions in *Mountains of Madness*. It shall begin by focusing on Lovecraft's representation of the Shoggoth, the apotheosis of the many hideous biological monstrosities which appear in his work. By closely examining his imagery, I will consider how Lovecraft's description of this abject creature not only reflects his generalised fear of non-western Otherness but links this concept to notions of consumption, contagion and putrefaction. In addition, the Shoggoth's vast, amorphous physicality will be interpreted in relation to Lovecraft's anxieties concerning subjectivity and his belief that the western ruling elite would shortly be wiped out by a debased and unfeeling collective.

³⁰¹ Ibid, p 270.

Having pushed the bounds of representation as far as possible with his overwhelming description of the Shoggoth, Lovecraft then adopts different literary techniques to signify the Antarctic's last and most mysterious phenomena. A text which revives *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*'s vision of the far south as a realm of metaphysical ambiguity, in *Mountains of Madness* Lovecraft integrates cryptic elements from Poe's novel into his plot. Once again, he portrays Antarctica's uncharted regions as places where the line separating genuine perceptions from the creations of the imagination becomes blurred. In the same way that it cannot be contained within language, whatever lurks in the great mountains remains an undefined liminal presence in the text itself. The ultimate source of terror in *Mountains of Madness*, it is simultaneously the one thing Lovecraft withholds from our sight. As this section shall assess, this is a further example of how Antarctic Gothic fiction has explored the enigmatic nature of experience and interrogated the limits of the rational mind.

Early on in 'Supernatural Horror in Literature' (1927), Lovecraft makes an important distinction regarding the genre. He writes that there has been a tendency to confuse authentic 'fear-literature' with two types of fiction which are "externally similar but psychologically widely different",³⁰² namely "the literature of mere physical fear and the mundanely gruesome".³⁰³ Although he recognises their appeal, for Lovecraft their reliance on lurid devices like "secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains",³⁰⁴ means that they have little artistic value. By contrast, what he terms "the literature of cosmic fear in its purest sense"³⁰⁵ must involve the evocation of "a certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces".³⁰⁶ For this

³⁰² H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, ed. E.F. Bleiler (New York: Dover Publications, 1973), p 15.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

reason, a story “in which the horrors are finally explained away by natural means”³⁰⁷ can never be a true work of cosmic terror, since the object of these is to leave the reader with “a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers”.³⁰⁸

As Lovecraft’s proceeds to demonstrate in his essay, it requires uncommon skill to achieve this effect: reveal too little in the way of horror and you fail to intrigue the reader, reveal too much and the vital aura of fearful mystery is lost. However, Lovecraft’s view that cosmic terror only results from an unearthly encounter which causes our orderly conception of reality and secure sense of selfhood to destabilize has obvious parallels with Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection. In Kristeva’s words, the abject is “a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable”.³⁰⁹ It is that which “disturbs identity, system, order...does not respect borders, positions, rules”,³¹⁰ and encompasses “the in-between, the ambiguous, [and] the composite”.³¹¹ A “‘something’ which I do not recognise as a thing”,³¹² the abject undermines the borders of our world and the boundaries of our identity, and as such Kristeva holds that it constitutes the place “where meaning collapses”.³¹³

Due to its preoccupation with the those things which break down constructed boundaries, the theory of abjection can be seen as sharing some fundamental concerns with the concept of liminality. Joachen Anchilles and Ina Bergmann have described liminality as “a concept both of demarcation and mediation between different processual stages, spatial complexes, and inner states”.³¹⁴ It focuses on the borders, thresholds and other

³⁰⁷ Ibid, p 16.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p 1.

³¹⁰ Ibid, p 4.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid, p 2.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Jochen Achilles and Ina Bergmann, ‘Betwixt and Between: Boundary Crossings in American, Canadian, and British Short Fiction’ in Jochen Achilles and Ina Bergmann ed. *Liminality and the Short Story: Boundary Crossing in American, Canadian, and British Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p 3.

interstitial areas and states which exist between different spaces and subjects. As Sandor Klapcsik has written, liminality denotes a space “of continuous transference, an *infinite process* formed by *transgressions* across evanescent, porous, evasive borderlines”³¹⁵ By analyzing such acts of transgression, like the abject it interrogates notions of interiority and exteriority, the subject/object relationship, and definitions of the natural and unnatural. In this way, liminality also examines the disruptive power of Otherness.

These concepts of abjection and liminality shall also inform the reading of John W. Campbell’s ‘Who Goes There?’ (1938) in the next chapter, but the recent work of David Simmons and Gina Wisker has demonstrated their value as critical tools for analysing the combination of terror and disgust engendered by Lovecraft’s cosmic horrors. Interpreting their abject physicality as unquestionably symbolic of Lovecraft’s unease at “the increasing levels of racial hybridization within America during the early twentieth century”,³¹⁶ the fact that his monstrous beings mostly linger on the fringes of epistemology leads Simmons to argue that his fiction represents a “considerably more multifaceted engagement with concepts of the non-Western *Other*”³¹⁷ than has previously been assumed. In Simmons’s opinion, the compulsive but futile attempts by Lovecraft’s narrators to accurately describe these nonhuman creatures, to represent that which by its very nature cannot be represented, are consistent with Kristeva’s notion of the abject as something which “not only signals that which is repulsive and threatens identity, but also represents a source of attraction”.³¹⁸

Similarly, Wisker has argued that Lovecraft’s cosmic horrors can also be classified as liminal beings on the basis of “their unfixed origins and identities, their acts of

³¹⁵ Sandor Klapcsik, *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction: A Poststructuralist Approach* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2012), p 3.

³¹⁶ David Simmons, “‘A Certain Resemblance’: Abject Hybridity in H.P. Lovecraft’s Short Fiction’ in David Simmons ed. *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p 14.

³¹⁷ Ibid, p 18.

³¹⁸ Ibid, p 19.

bridging races and of individual hybridity”.³¹⁹ While her analysis is confined to the monstrous females in Lovecraft’s fiction, these are characteristic of all of his abnormal beings inasmuch as they embody his paranoia about “the invasion of the foreign and alien Other through miscegenation”.³²⁰ In addition to their racial degeneracy, they occupy a form of liminal space which is unbounded by the normal ontological divisions. They are figures of fear because they violate all of the categories according to which human beings are defined. In the same way that the abject horrifies by exposing the instability of subjectivity, the liminal nature of these monstrous beings means that they represent what Wisker describes as a “terrifying connection with a world of dangerous, destructive, aberrant Otherness”.³²¹

Using these concepts to analyze the Shoggoth at first seems problematic because, unlike the abject and liminal beings discussed by Simmons and Wisker, Lovecraft fully represents its physical form. However, before he does so he employs a range of techniques to suggest what kind of creature it is, intensifying the dread which surrounds its imminent appearance. First of all, Dyer and Danforth observe that the already decadent sculptured murals on the cavern walls now show signs of “a difference in basic nature as well as in mere quality, and involving so profound and calamitous a degradation of skill that nothing in the hitherto observed rate of decline could have led one to expect it”.³²² These crude artworks have been superimposed over the originals by the Shoggoths, indicating the very point when they subjugated the Old Ones. The explorers are then almost overcome by a nauseating stench which emanates from a “freshly glistening and reflectively iridescent black slime”.³²³

³¹⁹ Gina Wisker, “‘Spawn of the Pit’: Lavinia, Marceline, Medusa, and All Things Foul: H.P. Lovecraft’s Liminal Women, in *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft*, p 33.

³²⁰ Ibid, p 32.

³²¹ Ibid, p 33.

³²² *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories* p 270.

³²³ Ibid, p 273.

In preparing the reader for the Shoggoth's manifestation, Lovecraft merges together a number of contrasting ideas to unsettling effect: the Shoggoth is a creature sufficiently intelligent and self-aware to create an artwork glorifying the rise to power of its kind, and yet it leaves behind it the vile stench of something decomposing and the slimy trail of a gastropod. These last details are especially significant, given Kristeva's contention that those bodily fluids, foul odours and types of filth which violate our corporeal boundaries generate intense instances of abjection.³²⁴ Also, even though it is apparent that these murals were reworked hundreds of millions of years ago their fresh coating of slime is a representation of the Shoggoth's liminality, the fact that time means nothing to these creatures and they clearly continue to thrive in the present exactly as they did in the ancient past.

In their murals, the Old Ones depict the Shoggoths as "[f]ormless protoplasm able to mock and reflect all forms and organs and processes – viscous agglutinations of bubbling cells – rubbery fifteen-foot spheroids infinitely plastic and ductile",³²⁵ and this shapelessness is the very essence of their horror. Earlier in the novel Lovecraft devotes several pages to an anatomical account of the Old Ones themselves, and although the bizarre entities he describes are ones which, in China Miéville's words, "mock the Linnaean schema and the preconceptions of history",³²⁶ they are nonetheless composed of elements of actual organic life forms (starfish, butterflies, vegetables etc.). Along with their sophisticated minds and artistic sensibilities, their definite physiological structure allows Dyer to sympathise with them, and to recognise that "[t]hey were the men of another age

³²⁴ See *The Powers of Horror*, p 2-4.

³²⁵ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p273.

³²⁶ China Miéville Introduction to H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), p xiii.

and another order of being”.³²⁷ Since their former slaves possess none of these qualities, they can only inspire revulsion.

In addition to their stench, slime and jellylike composition, Lovecraft portrays the Shoggoths as loathsome because they are the absolute embodiment of dispassionate and pragmatic calculation. Created from inorganic matter, they grew capable of moulding “their tough plasticity into various useful temporary limbs and organs”.³²⁸ As organisms originally bred to perform menial work, their every action and all of the forms they assume are dictated by their given task, not by curiosity or any deeper motivation. In this sense, they are infinitely adaptable but at the same time horrifyingly inflexible. Just as their bodies can only mimic pre-existing forms, the Shoggoth’s creativity is limited to imitating the works of others. Consequently, Lovecraft depicts the Shoggoths as anti-intellectual parasites who murdered their own creators by decapitation and now scavenge in the bowels of their master’s civilization.

Lovecraft’s first visit to New York in 1922 prompted some of his most vehemently xenophobic remarks. He wrote that the city’s Lower East Side was populated with “organic things – Italo-Semitico-Mongoloid”³²⁹ which “could not by any stretch of the imagination be call’d human”.³³⁰ In his words, the district was reminiscent of “some avenue of Cyclopean and unwholesome vats, crammed to the vomiting point with gangrenous vileness, and about to burst and inundate the world in one leprous cataclysm of semi-fluid rottenness”.³³¹ These abject qualities are the same ones Lovecraft would later attribute to the Shoggoths. Just as he regarded the denizens of these slums as indistinguishable from the filth of their squalid living conditions, the Shoggoths resemble

³²⁷ H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p273.

³²⁸ Ibid, p 245.

³²⁹ H.P. Lovecraft, *Selected Letters Vol. I: 1911-1924*, ed., August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House Publishers, 1965), p 333.

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

the waste produced by living entities more than any form of actual creature. They have intelligence but exist only to consume, and reside within the ‘body’ of the Antarctic city like a contagion, rendering it ever-more loathsome. Roger Luckhurst has noted their similarity to “the primordial goo that Victorian biologists such as T.H. Huxley speculated was the basis of all life”,³³² but they equally resemble bacteria only enlarged to gigantic proportions.

Even though the explorers have formed an idea of the Shoggoths from the Old Ones’ murals, this does not make its eventual manifestation any easier to process. What emerges from the abyss is “something altogether different, and immeasurably more hideous and detestable”,³³³ than Dyer has been led to expect. Once again, Lovecraft’s imagery mirrors that of his account of the inhabitants of the slums of New York. As he saw it, these people appeared “vaguely moulded from some stinking viscous slime of earth’s corruption”,³³⁴ and were constantly “slithering and oozing in and on the filthy streets or in and out of windows and doorways in a fashion suggestive of nothing but festering worms or deep-sea unnamabilities”.³³⁵

Aside from its obvious abject dimension, it is clear that Lovecraft’s racist rhetoric operates by reducing this ethnically diverse population into a single grotesque incarnation of liminal Otherness. This is similar to what Dyer finds so disturbing about the Shoggoth: the fact that it has no overall identity and is just a volatile mass of undifferentiated tissue makes it an affront to the very concept of subjectivity. Apart from its blackness, its only other distinguishing features are its “myriads of temporary eyes”,³³⁶ which, like its sprawling bulky form, identify it with the image of a vast rampaging human crowd. It is these staring, lidless eyes which, as Miéville’s has written, leave no doubt that what

³³² H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p 476, N. 240.

³³³ Ibid, p 278.

³³⁴ *Selected Letters Vol. I.*, p 334.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ H.P. Lovecraft: *The Classic Horror Stories*, p 279.

Lovecraft is actually presenting to the reader is a “dehumanizing, subhumanizing vision of the masses”.³³⁷

In the same letter, Lovecraft went on to record his disgust at the way these crowds of people “or the degenerate gelatinous fermentations of which they were composed – seem’d to ooze, seep, and trickle thro’ the gaping cracks in the horrible houses”.³³⁸ This closely matches Dyer’s description of how the “nightmare, plastic column of fetid black iridescence oozed tightly onward through its fifteen-foot sinus”³³⁹ in pursuit of him. In this respect, the horror of the Shoggoth once again lies in its amorphousness, the fact that it is a living organism but one which does not possess what biology classifies as a body. Instead, it is merely the embodiment of its own liminality because it has no fixed dimensions, as well as the embodiment of abjection because it is an obscene combination of mouth, stomach and anus.

Finally, it is also evident that Dyer’s loathing for the Shoggoth is matched by an overwhelming fascination. Its complete desecration of the idea of organic life makes it “the utter, objective embodiment of the fantastic novelist’s ‘thing that should not be’”,³⁴⁰ and its unbearable Otherness must therefore be displaced into the linguistic realm. Kristeva posits that in compelling the abject into language, a writer “imagines its logic, projects himself onto it, and as a consequence perverts language – style and content”.³⁴¹ The crazed profusion of adjectives which results from Dyer’s attempt to articulate what he saw are symptomatic of his desperate struggle to inscribe the unfathomable. As Luckhurst argues, such moments of “linguistic collapse”³⁴² are the inevitable outgrowth of the “dynamic of

³³⁷ *At the Mountains of Madness* (2005), p xxiii.

³³⁸ *Selected Letters Vol. I.*, p 334.

³³⁹ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p279.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p 278.

³⁴¹ *The Powers of Horror*, p 16.

³⁴² Roger Luckhurst, Introduction to *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p xx.

the sublime and disgusting”,³⁴³ which attends the experience of cosmic horror in Lovecraft’s fiction. Even as he represents the Shoggoth, Dyer acknowledges that it was “a terrible, indescribable thing”,³⁴⁴ infinitely more abhorrent than words can convey [Fig. 53].

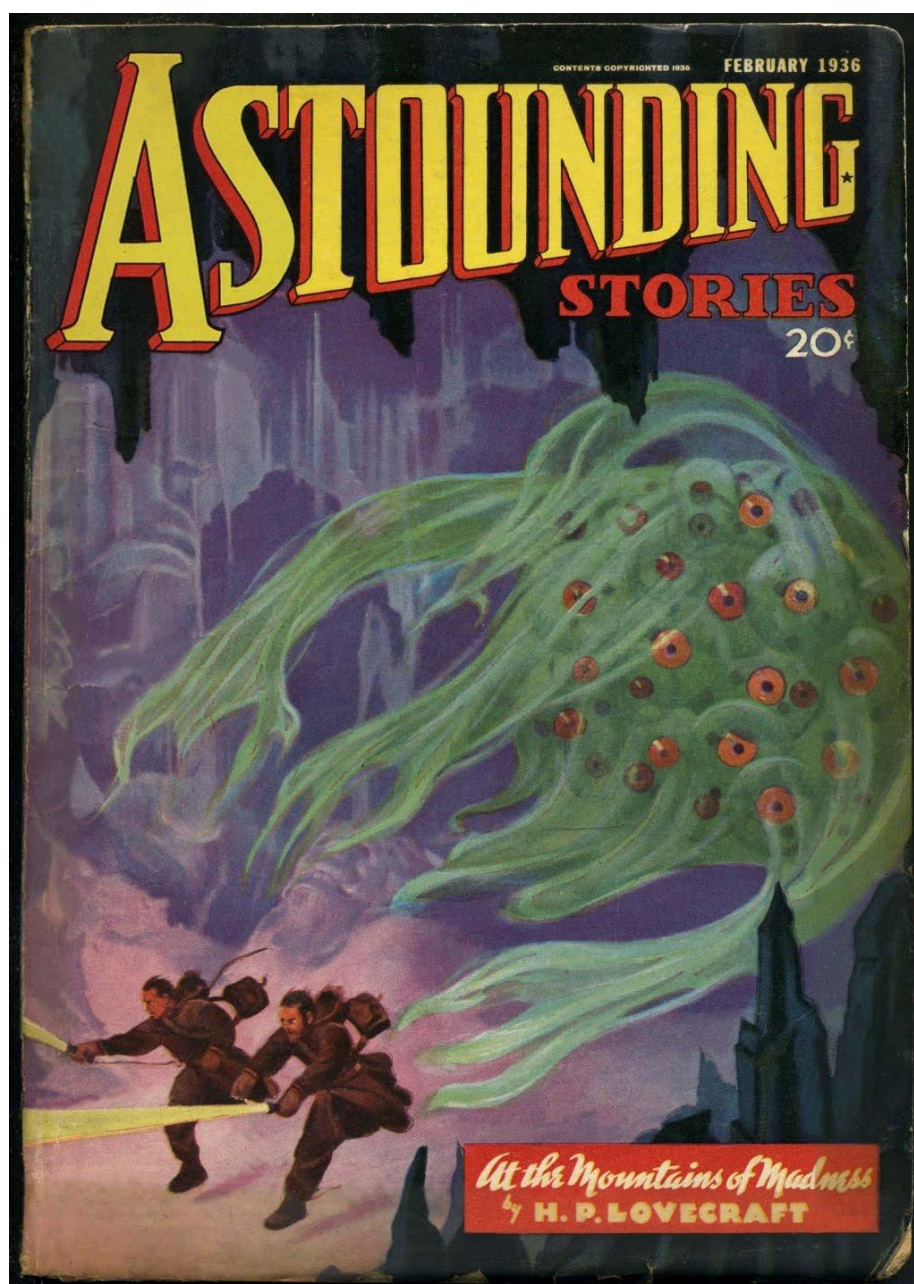


Fig. 53: Dyer and Danforth flee from the Shoggoth. Cover art for *Astounding Stories*, February 1936

³⁴³ Ibid, p xviii.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, p 279.

A perplexing aspect of Lovecraft's novel is his inclusion of the otherworldly cry 'Tekeli-li', one of several motifs borrowed from *Arthur Gordon Pym*. This recurs throughout *Mountains of Madness*, and Dyer recalls that in Poe's novel it had "an unknown but terrible and prodigious significance connected with the antarctic".³⁴⁵ The explorers eventually discover that it is the Shoggoths imitating the voices of their dead masters, but they are already haunted by this "insidious musical piping",³⁴⁶ because it is an affirmation of the alienness of the polar world. This use of language to create an atmosphere of uncertainty can be traced back to Lovecraft's New York stories, which detail their protagonist's unease at finding themselves in a "polyglot abyss",³⁴⁷ they cannot decipher. In 'The Horror at Red Hook' (1927), for example, the slum district is described as "a babel of sound",³⁴⁸ where "the blasphemies of a hundred dialects assail the sky".³⁴⁹ Like the tunnels beneath the polar city, the alienness of this "tangle of material and spiritual putrescence",³⁵⁰ is enhanced by a constant chorus of strange cries. These sounds disturb the narrator for the same reason the cry of 'Tekeli-li', unnerves the Antarctic explorers: they are destined to remain unintelligible to them, a constant reminder of the realm's incomprehensible Otherness.

While there can be little doubt that it was the primary model for his polar fiction, Lovecraft's incorporation of the cry 'Tekeli-li' along with several other references to *Arthur Gordon Pym* in *Mountains of Madness* have led to an extensive debate concerning the extent to which it should be considered a sequel to Poe's original Antarctic Gothic tale. Jules Zanger has come closest to defining their relationship, and instead of a direct continuation of *Arthur Gordon Pym* he contends that *Mountains of Madness* "might better

³⁴⁵ Ibid, p 275.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ H.P. Lovecraft, 'The Horror of Red Hook' in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 5.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, p 6.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

be described as a parallel text, the two tales co-existing in a shared context of allusion”.³⁵¹

Although Ringel’s observation that Lovecraft’s work “explains the mysteries of Poe’s novella”³⁵² is also correct, in its concluding stages he constructs a rich and intriguing enigma of his own.

If the Shoggoth performs the same function in Lovecraft’s text as the natives of Tsalal do in *Arthur Gordon Pym*, and perpetuates what Simmons terms “the larger Gothic tradition of depicting non-Western people and cultures as a horrific *Other*”,³⁵³ then his final enigma has a function equivalent to that of Poe’s great white figure, a form of metaphysical mystification which overflows the limits of the text. Lovecraft wrote that although the Shoggoth constituted the novel’s “concrete and tangible climax”,³⁵⁴ what he had also “wished to add was merely a vague hint of further spiritual horrors”.³⁵⁵ As with the confrontation with the Shoggoth, the reader is led inexorably toward this moment of non-revelation from a much earlier point in the novel. Dyer explains that in addition to all of the unbelievable things described in his narrative, Danforth “saw, or thinks he saw, one thing he will not even tell me”.³⁵⁶ Even though Dyer is convinced that this strange phenomenon was no more than a delusion, he still accepts that it is was the cause of Danforth’s nervous collapse.

Dyer feels he is justified in explaining the phenomenon away in this fashion because of the many nightmarish mirages the expedition has experienced. Since these mirages occur so frequently in the far south, he states that “[t]he imagination could conceive almost anything in connection with this place”.³⁵⁷ As Robert Waugh has

³⁵¹ Jules Zanger, ‘Poe’s Endless Voyage: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*’ in *Papers on Language and Literature* Vol. 22, No. 3 (Summer 1986), p 282.

³⁵² *A Companion to the American Gothic*, p 270.

³⁵³ *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft*, p 15.

³⁵⁴ H.P. Lovecraft, Letter to August Derleth, May 16, 1931, Reproduced in S.T. Joshi ed. *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 2001), p 437. N. 111.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁶ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 212.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p 233.

demonstrated, Lovecraft skilfully conflates the imagery of these phantasmal visions with that of the stupendous mountains and polar city until “we cannot distinguish between reality and the mirage”.³⁵⁸ In this way, the reader comes to experience the same form of radical uncertainty as the fictional explorers. More than any other feature of Lovecraft’s Antarctica, the towering westward mountains are the absolute manifestation of its unnaturalness. Dyer learns that they were the first part of the continent to emerge from the ocean, but the cities built near them fell into ruin. The “highest of earth’s peaks and the focus of earth’s evil”,³⁵⁹ they were the source of an object abhorrent beyond depiction, and were feared and prayed to by the Old Ones.

When the explorers behold these “cryptic violet mountains”,³⁶⁰ they seem less a part of the Earth and more “like the serrated edge of a monstrous alien planet about to rise into unaccustomed heavens”. However, what they actually resemble is a distorted mirage-version of the mountains of madness. While the Polar Shroud of *Arthur Gordon Pym* was a realm of radiant whiteness, the glowing violet haze and “seething, grotesquely clouded” red sky which surround the western peaks attest to the influence of another Gothic polar fiction. M.P. Shiel’s *The Purple Cloud* (1901) relates the strange journey of Adam Jeffson, who returns from the first successful expedition to the North Pole only to find that a giant cloud of deadly gas has poisoned the human race and left civilisation in ruins. As well as a source of imagery, it is possible that *The Purple Cloud* was also a thematic influence for *Mountains of Madness*. In ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature’, Lovecraft praises the early sections of Shiel’s book, in particular his description of a “curse which came out of the arctic to destroy mankind”.³⁶¹ Therefore, he may have conceived the abysmal unknown threat which Dyer fears will be released from its mountainous lair as an Antarctic

³⁵⁸ Robert Waugh, ‘Looming at the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraft’s Mirages’ in *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft*, p 97.

³⁵⁹ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p280.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p 281.

³⁶¹ *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, p 78.

counterpart to Shiel's vision of doom sweeping down across the globe from the Arctic Circle.

Whereas the white figure of *Arthur Gordon Pym* exists only in the unverifiable account of a dead man, Dyer must piece together what he did not see from Danforth's fragmentary hints. One of these is a reference to an earlier Lovecraft work, 'The Colour out of Space' (1927),³⁶² implying that it was not an actual entity but something which, like the cosmic terror in that tale, always eludes representation. An irruption of numinosity, it transcends human thought and exposes human language as no more than what Miéville terms an "inadequate symbolic system".³⁶³ Danforth also claims that it was a mirage, but unlike Dyer he does not mean that it was simply another of Antarctic's optical illusions. Instead, this suggests that what he saw was a perversion of the nature of reality, one great enough to upset mankind's most basic assumptions about the universe.

In conclusion, Lovecraft ends the novel by posing a final conundrum: how could Danforth have seen so much in "a single fantastic, demoniac glimpse"?³⁶⁴ The answer can perhaps be found in another of Lovecraft's earlier works. As the narrator of 'The Call of Cthulhu' (1928) maintains, "[t]he most merciful thing in the world...is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents".³⁶⁵ He too has had a "single glimpse of forbidden aeons",³⁶⁶ a maddening vision produced by "an accidental piecing together of separated things".³⁶⁷ Like Danforth, who has also been engaged in strange and mysterious research, the narrator knows that his awful discovery must be kept secret. However, Danforth has no choice but to keep silent about the "ultimate nameless thing":³⁶⁸ the terrifying connections

³⁶² *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p283.

³⁶³ China Miéville, 'Weird Fiction' in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, and Sherry Vint ed., *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2009), p 512.

³⁶⁴ *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p283.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p 281.

³⁶⁶ H.P. Lovecraft, 'The Call of Cthulhu' in *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories*, p 24.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p 214.

he has made between the Antarctic and the rest of the planet and between the myths contained in ancient occult texts and reality cannot be revealed in human words. They can be represented only in the esoteric language of Antarctica – ‘Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!’

Chapter Six:
“It’s Crawling There in the Ice Right Now!”:¹
John W. Campbell’s ‘Who Goes There?’
and the Many Forms of *The Thing*.

¹ John W. Campbell, Jr., ‘Who Goes There?’ (United States: Rocket Ride Books, 2009), p 30.

Even as he departed from Antarctica on the 19th of February 1930, Richard E. Byrd had already begun to devise his plans for returning to the region. He later wrote that for him the “intangible attraction of the white continent”² could only be explained in terms of “the pull of discovery, of seeing new lands and fitting into the jig-saw of geography the missing pieces beyond the horizon”.³ By using aircraft to chart the continent, Byrd had reduced the still considerable quantity of unmapped space in the South Polar Regions by an impressive amount. Equally as important, by constructing Little America and occupying it for a year, the expedition had not only given this base the status of a sovereign U.S. territory;⁴ it had proven that Antarctica could be made habitable.

However, Byrd very nearly became the victim of his own hubris. Since he had made an aerial survey of the South Pole and the majority of the Transantarctic Mountains and claimed to have already conducted “the most complete programme of scientific research in the history of polar exploration”,⁵ the American public initially failed to see the necessity for him to go back. Undiscouraged, Byrd then successfully campaigned for the funds for further exploration using two key arguments. Firstly, he maintained that substantial advances in physics, especially the study of cosmic rays, meant that an additional expedition was now essential as it would provide a greater knowledge “of the permanent magnetic field of the earth”.⁶ Secondly, Byrd appealed to a nation still suffering the crippling effects of the Great Depression when he argued that even though Antarctica’s glacial surface meant that much of the continent was destined to remain “a frozen asset”,⁷ his first expedition had confirmed that “[i]mmense coal deposits exist in the mountains,

² Richard E. Byrd, *Discovery: The Story of the Second Byrd Antarctic Expedition* (London: Putnam, 1936), p 1.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ For a full, technical account of the criteria which allowed explorers to legally establish sovereignty over Antarctic lands in this period see David Day, *Antarctica: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p 229-232, 282-283.

⁵ *Discovery*, p 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p 4.

and traces of commercial ores have been found”.⁸ In this way, he cunningly hinted that if science continued to probe beneath Antarctica’s skin of ice discoveries of immense value might be made.

The fifty-six men who composed the Wintering Party of the Second Byrd Antarctic Expedition embarked from Boston on the 25th of September, 1933. Altogether, the massive expedition brought with it two ships, four aircraft, numerous motorized vehicles, 150 dogs and four cows, along with the equipment required by a scientific personnel which this time included biologists, oceanographers, and geophysicists. On the 17th of January, 1934, construction began on a new settlement which incorporated the remains of Little America, still intact underneath the snow of the Ross Ice Shelf. Much larger than its predecessor, for these explorers Little America II became more than just a base of operations: it was their home for more than twelve months. The expedition finally departed for New Zealand on the 5th of February, 1935, having successfully measured the extent of the Ross Ice Shelf and the Polar Plateau, mapped much of the unclaimed land east of the Ross Dependency, and carried out a comprehensive analysis of the Earth’s magnetic field.

November 1935 saw the publication of *Discovery: The Story of the Second Byrd Expedition*, and the explorer concluded this account by stating that as a result of his latest endeavours “a grand total of new land and sea of roughly 450,000 square miles”⁹ had been added to the Antarctic map. Byrd’s message to the American people was more compelling than ever: under his leadership far-southern colonisation was proceeding apace, and he now needed the U.S. government to provide him with all of the resources for yet another, even more ambitious Antarctic expedition, one which would give America a decisive role in the continent’s future. Almost three years later in August 1938, while Byrd’s latest venture was rapidly gaining momentum, the magazine *Astounding Science-Fiction*

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid, p 408.

published a work which constituted a disturbing riposte to this narrative of polar patriotism. ‘Who Goes There?’ by Don. A. Stuart, was in actuality written by the man who had become the magazine’s editor ten months earlier, John W. Campbell, Jr. Using a variety of pseudonyms, Campbell had been a prolific contributor to such pulp titles as *Amazing Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* since his teenage years and he continued to write while studying at Duke University, where he obtained a degree in physics in 1932. Although it would become his most highly-renowned tale, ‘Who Goes There?’ proved to be the 28 year-old Campbell’s final work since his strenuous editorial duties eventually precluded him from producing fiction of his own.

In a frighteningly credible manner, Campbell’s tale depicts the unfolding of an absolute scientific nightmare. Instead of fossil fuels or precious metals, a team of American polar researchers unearth the grotesque body of an alien entity from the ice in which it was entombed after crash-landing on Earth twenty million years earlier. After transporting it to their isolated research station where it rapidly thaws out, they discover that the alien organism is not only still alive but capable of absorbing and exactly replicating the biological forms of other beings. Faced with the fearful prospect that it may now be mimicking any number of them, the beleaguered scientists must find a means to destroy the Thing before it escapes from Antarctica and proceeds to consume every living creature on the planet.

The most popular and well-known text examined in this thesis, this analysis of ‘Who Goes There?’ shall begin by placing it within the tradition of Antarctic Gothic fiction. Often regarded as an exemplary merging of science-fiction and horror literature, I shall argue that Campbell’s tale shares enough key characteristics with the earlier texts in the Antarctic Gothic sub-genre that it too can be included within this category. Like the works of Poe, Verne and Lovecraft, Campbell’s story makes use of the Antarctic as a

unique location where the forces of science encounter forms of radical otherness which embody humanity's fears and uncertainties about the nature of the universe. In addition, I shall argue that 'Who Goes There?' can be considered an example of Antarctic Gothic fiction since many of its ideas and details are derived from an actual exploration narrative, in this case Byrd's account of his second expedition. Therefore, the critical reading of Campbell's tale which forms the core of this chapter will examine the work as one which both revisits the themes of previous Antarctic Gothic texts while at the same time taking the sub-genre into terrifying new territory.

Like the other works analyzed in this thesis, 'Who Goes There?' has also transcended the specific historical conditions of its composition and, much like the shape-shifting entity it features, has re-emerged time and again in a myriad of different forms. One of the most commonly anthologised fictions from this era [**Fig. 54**],¹⁰ it has spawned no less than three different film adaptations, including a classic 1950s 'B movie',¹¹ as well as one of the most highly regarded examples of modern horror cinema.¹² It has also been used as the basis for a full-length novel,¹³ which both updates and substantially develops Campbell's original story, and even a comic book series.¹⁴ More importantly, this

¹⁰ After its original publication in *Astounding* it formed the title story of a collection of Campbell's tales, *Who Goes There?* (New York: Shasta Publishing, 1948). Since Raymond J. Healy and J. Francis McComas first included it in their landmark science-fiction anthology *Adventures in Time and Space* (New York: Random House, 1946) the story has been reprinted in a diverse range of science-fiction and horror compilations, including Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg, and Charles G. Waugh ed., *The Mammoth Book of Short Science Fiction Novels* (London: Robinson, 1986) and more recently in Paul Kane and Marie O'Regan ed., *The Mammoth Book of Body Horror* (London: Robinson, 2012). In 1973 the Science-Fiction Writers of America voted the tale one of the 22 greatest short works in the genre written between 1895 and 1962, and it was subsequently republished in Ben Bova ed., *The Science-Fiction Hall of Fame* (New York: Doubleday, 1973).

¹¹ *The Thing from Another World* (1951), directed by Christian Nyby, produced by Howard Hawks, and screenplay by Charles Lederer.

¹² *The Thing* (1982), directed by John Carpenter, produced by David Foster, Lawrence Turman, and Stuart Cohen, and screenplay by Bill Lancaster.

¹³ *The Thing* (London: Corgi, 1982), written by Alan Dean Foster and based on the screenplay by Bill Lancaster.

¹⁴ *The Thing from Another World: Climate of Fear* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 1992), written by John Arcudi, Jim Somerville, Brian Garvey, Robert Jones and Richard Starkings, and its sequels *The Thing from Another World* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 1993) written by Chuck Pfarrer, John Higgins and Richard Starkings, and *The Thing from Another World: Eternal Vows* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 1993), written by David de Vries, Paul Gulacy and Dan Davis.

Antarctic Gothic tale and its various incarnations have also proven invaluable to contemporary philosophers, who have used it to explore a range of complex concepts relating to human identity and the nature of being. In particular, a number of critics¹⁵ have argued that the Thing itself perfectly exemplifies Julia Kristeva's notion of abjection as that which erases the boundaries between the self and the other, and also the transgressive and volatile nature of liminal flesh. Therefore, by focusing on the exceptional versatility of 'Who Goes There?' as a text which interrogates some of the most basic assumptions concerning existence, this chapter shall demonstrate the lasting ingenuity and unsettling power of Campbell's work.



Fig 54: A selection of cover art for the numerous reprints of Campbell's story

¹⁵ Two critical readings which analyze the parallels between Campbell's shape-shifting monstrosity and Kristeva's concept of abjection are Elizabeth Leane, 'Locating the Thing: the Antarctic as Alien Space in John W. Campbell's "Who Goes There?,"' *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 32, No.2 (July 2005) pp 225-239, and Andrew Butler, 'Abjection and *The Thing*', *Vector: the Journal of the British Science Fiction Association* 213 (September/October 2000) pp 10-13.

The argument that ‘Who Goes There?’ is a work of Antarctic Gothic fiction must, of course, begin by acknowledging its relative proximity to the previous major entry in this sub-genre. The tale was not only published little more than two years after *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936), it also appeared in the pages of the same magazine as Lovecraft’s tale, *Astounding Stories*, which Campbell had by then renamed *Astounding Science-Fiction*. Moreover, the two works possess a range of striking similarities: both concern a team of American scientists working in Antarctica, have plots which involve the unearthing of seemingly dead extraterrestrial organisms which return to life resulting in death and insanity, and both feature a vile, form-changing creature. For this reason, even those critics¹⁶ who regard ‘Who Goes There?’ as more than just a truncated rendition of *Mountains of Madness* still presume that Lovecraft’s earlier work was the direct inspiration for Campbell’s own Antarctic narrative.

The truth of the relationship between these texts is more complex. When *Mountains of Madness* was belatedly serialised, it received an overwhelmingly negative response. The three instalments of Lovecraft’s tale of far-southern terror were openly derided in the letters page of *Astounding Stories*, and one unimpressed individual summed up the general attitude of its readers when they trenchantly enquired “Why in the name of science-fiction did you ever print such a story as *At the Mountains of Madness* by Lovecraft? Are you in such dire straits that you must print this kind of drivel?”¹⁷ The sentiment expressed in this letter is unmistakeable: the variety of weird tale Lovecraft specialised in was now seen as

¹⁶ These include Faye Ringel in ‘I am Providence: H.P. Lovecraft’ in Charles L. Crow ed., *A Companion to the American Gothic* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), China Miéville in his introduction to *At the Mountains of Madness* (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), Steffen Hantke in ‘From the Library of America to the Mountains of Madness: Recent Discourse on H. P. Lovecraft’, and Mark Jones in ‘Tentacles and Teeth: The Lovecraftian Being in Popular Culture’ in David Simmons ed., *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). All suggest that Campbell’s tale is, to some extent, a response to Lovecraft’s work.

¹⁷ Reproduced in Will Murray, ‘Lovecraft and the Pulp Magazine Tradition’ in David E. Schultz and S.T. Joshi ed., *An Epicure in the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honour of H.P. Lovecraft* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1991), p 125.

exactly the kind of work which posed an embarrassment to the cutting-edge genre of science-fiction. Undoubtedly it was this kind of damaging perception which led Campbell to change the title of the magazine not long after his appointment.

Indeed, Campbell himself was scarcely more sympathetic towards the author who had already written one of the definitive Antarctic Gothic fictions. When he founded *Unknown*, *Astounding's* short-lived sister publication conceived as a higher-quality rival for *Weird Tales*, Campbell stated emphatically that "I do not want unpleasant gods and godlings with penchants for vivisection...I do not want the kind of stuff Lovecraft doted on. He was immensely liked – by the small clique that read *Weird* regularly. It still wasn't good writing".¹⁸ In this way, even though tales like *Mountains of Madness* were exactly the kind of mature, intellectually demanding horror literature Lovecraft had always aspired to produce, for Campbell they epitomized the excesses which marred so much of pulp fiction. Just like most of the readers of *Astounding*, he viewed Lovecraft's work as clumsy and antiquated in comparison to the output of an entire new generation of writers.

On assuming the editorship of *Astounding*, Campbell began a personal crusade both to establish science-fiction as a respectable and innovative literary genre and to disentangle it from what he saw as the lesser varieties of fiction with which it was perennially associated, primarily juvenile fantasy adventure stories and sensational works of supernatural horror. In the words of Farah Mendlesohn, *Astounding* offered readers an unprecedented mixture of "hard SF, social thought-experiments, and space opera",¹⁹ and its tremendous popularity and influence meant that Campbell became "the editor who took SF into its own future".²⁰ By gathering together a coterie of authors who shared his progressive vision, including Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, L. Sprague de Camp, and

¹⁸ John W. Campbell, Jr., Letter to Jack Williamson, 6th January 1939, reproduced in *An Epicure in the Terrible*, p 129.

¹⁹ Farah Mendlesohn, 'Fiction, 1926-1949', in Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint. ed., *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), p 53.

²⁰ Ibid.

A.E. van Vogt, Campbell was responsible for the publication of what Leon Stover has described as “a decisive body of work that changed the direction of science-fiction, leading at its best to philosophical sophistication”.²¹

If Campbell perceived his own fiction as part of an attempt to introduce a much-needed degree of scientific accuracy to a species of literature which had originated from the Gothic novel and the scientific romance in the nineteenth century, the inclusion of ‘Who Goes There?’ within the sub-genre of the Antarctic Gothic appears increasingly problematic. However, Campbell’s disdain for earlier works of science-fiction may have owed more to their style than their content. The previous chapters have shown that science-fiction was, from the beginning, a quintessential component of the hybrid form of the Antarctic Gothic. As a mode of speculative fiction which portrays the far south as the very frontier of the unknown, it subverts science’s aspiration towards absolute understanding. Campbell’s dismissive remarks concerning Lovecraft suggest that he failed to appreciate that the unearthly elements of his work were metaphors, conceptual devices intended to represent the possible limits of human knowledge. Since Lovecraft’s style was characterised by linguistic excess and he indulged in creating monsters with strange names, in Campbell’s opinion this negated the possibility that his works dealt with any real epistemological questions.

In her analysis of ‘Who Goes There?’ Elizabeth Leane suggests that Campbell was “self-consciously writing in the tradition of the Antarctic Gothic”,²² a claim she supports by noting the tale’s references to Coleridge’s ‘Ancient Mariner’ and close resemblance to *Mountains of Madness*. While Campbell may have recognised the sub-genre, it is unlikely that he would have seen his own story as in any way connected with it. Indeed, ‘Who Goes

²¹ Leon Stover, *Science Fiction from Wells to Heinlein* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2002), p 25.

²² Elizabeth Leane, *Antarctica in Fiction: Imaginative Narratives of the Far South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p 75. She explores Campbell’s debt to the earlier works of Antarctic Gothic fiction in greater detail in ‘Locating the Thing: The Antarctic as Alien Space in John W. Campbell’s ‘Who Goes There?’’, *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (July 2005), p 225-239.

There' certainly does not possess the overt intertextual quality which allows a direct link to be traced between the narratives of Poe, Verne and Lovecraft. Nevertheless, the tale belongs in the category of Antarctic Gothic fiction for the very same reason as their works: it depicts the far south as a realm of metaphysical mystery where the extreme fallibility of the human mind is made horrifyingly manifest. As Stephen J. Pyne has observed, 'Who Goes There?' belongs to this sub-genre as much as these earlier texts because it also constitutes "an example of how the isolation and alienness of Antarctica could be put to literary purposes".²³

Campbell wrote that his original intention in composing the story was to convey to the reader "a feeling of the inescapable tension and fear brooding in the Antarctic camp".²⁴ On the surface, his grim and sombre tale does seem far removed from the more fantastical works analysed in this thesis, but once again these differences are only stylistic. Reflecting his desire for greater precision in the fictional treatment of scientific matters, 'Who Goes There?' offers a description of Antarctica loaded with authentic technical details concerning its weather systems, extreme environment and geographical formations. Although Campbell's depiction of the continent is decidedly more realistic than those in the works previously discussed, it ultimately serves the same purposes as the semblances of verisimilitude established by Poe, Verne and Lovecraft: it demonstrates the otherworldly strangeness and remoteness of the actual far south, as well as creating the conditions which make the story's purely imaginary elements seem equally as plausible. The tale's alien creature is only able to inspire terror precisely because the reader has been provided with a credible account of the exceptional climactic factors which have preserved its life for millions of years.

²³ Stephen J. Pyne, *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003), p 193.

²⁴ John W. Campbell, Jr., Introduction to *Who Goes There?* (London: Gollancz 2011), p ix.

Whether Campbell intended it to or not, ‘Who Goes There?’ also harkens back to some of the main themes and ideas of the Antarctic Gothic fictions which preceded it. Like *Arthur Gordon Pym*, it portrays the far south as a place where human curiosity uncovers much more than it can fully comprehend. The theme of magnetism, central to *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm*, is once again employed as a metaphor for the mystifying yet overwhelming attraction of the South Polar Regions, the unseen force which has, both literally and symbolically, drawn the humans and their extraterrestrial foe to this most desolate of places. The common attributes which unite Campbell’s tale and *Mountains of Madness* have already been noted, above all the concept of suspended animation and the return of alien horrors from the primordial past. However, ‘Who Goes There?’ deviates from these earlier works in one crucial respect: it is not concerned with exploration in the traditional sense.

Leane has observed that most of the critical analyses of ‘Who Goes There?’ regard its Antarctic setting as of no special significance, and view it as simply “a generic isolated, self-contained environment”²⁵ and one of many potential locations which Campbell could have chosen. As this chapter will shortly examine, Leane’s reading correctly reinstates the far south as a central aspect of the tale, arguing that its entire meaning “rests on the specificity of the Antarctic”²⁶ as a region. Furthermore, the tale’s engagement with the new perceptions of the far south which emerged in the late 1930s has also been overlooked. Now that technology allowed explorers to fly from the Ross Ice Shelf to the South Pole and back in only a few hours, Byrd popularised the notion of the continent as an enormously important scientific resource which America needed to control. As Jez Conolly has written, Byrd’s second expedition had also “awakened frontier fantasies”²⁷ by reviving the romanticised image of Antarctica as the Earth’s last great wilderness. Like its

²⁵ ‘Locating the Thing’, p 227.

²⁶ Ibid, p 228.

²⁷ Jez Conolly, *Devil’s Advocates: The Thing* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2014), p 25.

predecessor, this expedition had represented the height of modern scientific ambition; it marked the next phase in converting this distant and dangerous land into one vast research centre, where new forms of study could provide answers to some of the most enduring scientific questions.

Instead of being a fictionalised exploration narrative, Campbell's tale takes a new approach to the Antarctic Gothic sub-genre by Gothicising the existence of far-southern colonists. Byrd had already documented the experience of living in a system of buildings half-buried under the white surface of the Ross Ice Shelf in *Little America* (1930). That account had, of course, been punctuated by lengthy descriptions of his many flights across the continent. By contrast, *Discovery* focused on the winter months which Byrd's men spent essentially trapped inside a chain of prefabricated metal cabins interconnected by tunnels of ice. His assistant, C.J.V. Murphy, later wrote that even though Little America II "was not lacking in luxuries unknown to exploring camps of the past",²⁸ such as a movie projector and a dark room, these diversions only "helped to dissipate for a few hours the gloom and emptiness of the winter night".²⁹ Every moment the men passed within the "oppressive and taxing"³⁰ atmosphere of this "frightfully congested"³¹ structure, they were conscious of the deadly conditions outside. Their sleep was frequently disturbed by ominous crackling and shrieking sounds, caused by the shifting of the ice which pressed in upon the base.³²

While earlier exploration narratives had not refrained from chronicling the appalling hardships and miseries of far-southern travel, *Discovery* was the first to fully describe the terrors associated with living beneath Antarctica's frozen surface. Having 'dug

²⁸ *Discovery*, p191. Although Byrd was the official author of this memoir, a number of sections were provided by Murphy. In particular, much of the account of life inside Little America II during the Antarctic winter was written by him.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p 191-192.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p 192.

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² *Ibid*, p 193.

in' for the duration of the winter, it was not long before the colonists of Little America II started reporting unusual phenomena: their senses of direction became uncertain and they constantly found themselves lost within the base's warren of subterranean tunnels;³³ through the outpost's few windows, Murphy wrote that the Antarctic sky now appeared "luminous [and covered] with a creeping sheen that seems alive";³⁴ one man was deeply startled by the sight of "a monstrous, inhuman thing",³⁵ which proved to be nothing more than his own shadow, grotesquely distorted in the ethereal polar light. Given the memoir's vivid evocation of this strange icebound existence, it is clear why *Discovery* became Campbell's primary source for his new work of Antarctic Gothic fiction.

Leane has already shown that 'Who Goes There?' contains several direct links to *Discovery*, including similar character names, the details of the Antarctic base, as well as instances of close paraphrasing.³⁶ On this basis, she rightly observes that "[m]any of Campbell's original readers would have recognised the parallels between his fictional expedition and Byrd's actual one",³⁷ yet another quality which unites the story with the other works in the Antarctic Gothic subgenre. Beyond these specific borrowings, the most significant correspondence between Campbell's tale and Byrd's memoir is their portrayal of the strained relationships between the men who had journeyed south. From its inception, Byrd had known that his first expedition would involve the sharing of an extremely confined environment for months on end. On reaching the far south, the situation quickly became so tense that he implemented an unrelenting work regime in an effort to keep his Antarctic colony harmonious.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid, p 186.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Leane notes that two of Campbell's characters are named Van Wall and Kinner, while Von der Wall and Skinner were the surnames of members of Byrd's second expedition. The layout of Campbell's base is virtually identical to Little America II. Both the tale and Byrd's account describe the men's living conditions as being like that of sardines in a can.

³⁷ *Antarctica in Fiction*, p 75.

In *Little America*, Byrd acknowledged that in addition to its scientific goals the expedition was also a pioneering experiment in designing an alternative social order. He wrote that by travelling to the South Polar Regions, he and his men were “trying to get away from the false standards by which men live under more civilised conditions”.³⁸ The Antarctic was “a new world for all of us which requires its own standards, and these are materially different from those set up in civilization, whereby we venerate prestige, influence and associated characteristics and ignore the inconspicuous, but equally valid qualities”.³⁹ In this place where reputation counted for nothing, the members of Byrd’s team could only affirm their individual value by unquestioningly performing their duties. Even though privacy was nonexistent, Byrd was convinced that the slightest suggestion of secrecy was all that was needed to “rend the most compactly organised group of men”.⁴⁰ Therefore, he wrote that “I wanted to create a single attitude – a single state of mind – unfettered by the trivial considerations of civilization”.⁴¹ As this chapter will now assess, ‘Who Goes There?’ portrays what Pyne has called Byrd’s “eccentric vision of a utopian society in the Antarctic”⁴² as terrifyingly vulnerable to forces both from within and without.

In Campbell’s tale, *Little America II* becomes *Big Magnet*, an ironic name given its intolerably claustrophobic atmosphere. The fragile nature of the colony’s equilibrium is already apparent in the story’s opening pages. The disagreement about whether the alien ‘corpse’ should be thawed out inside the base leads to a fierce debate. Nevertheless, since each member of the expedition has authority in relation to their own specific field, its biologist Blair manages to mollify the various objections to his plan. While his opponents

³⁸ Richard E. Byrd, *Little America: Aerial Exploration in the Antarctic, The Flight to the South Pole* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1930), p 193.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p 192.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² *The Ice*, p 155.

see the creature's total difference from everything known to science as sufficient grounds for keeping it in containment (or, as one character states, why they should simply "let it freeze for another twenty million years"⁴³), Blair uses this as the rationale for his argument that it cannot present any danger to earthly life. His overweening desire to unlock the alien's secrets leads him to disregard the safety of the colony, since he mistakenly assumes that it must obey the same scientific laws as all terrestrial phenomena.

This initial collapse of the colony's orderly system gives rise to a pattern of disintegration which recurs throughout the text. Once reanimated, the alien's body not only proves capable of deconstructing itself into a much simpler biological form, it can also cause the physical forms of other entities to violently destabilize. Realising that his arrogance has probably condemned all humanity to a hideous fate, Blair then tries to deprive the invader of potential hosts by wrecking the base before he lapses into insanity. The integrity of the colony is then further undermined by the possibility that many of its occupants have already been duplicated, forcing it to subdivide into small groups in order to prevent the alien from rapidly absorbing its entire personnel.

Before his mind crumbles, Blair states that for a human being to possess life there must be "organization and cooperative effort"⁴⁴ between all of its individual cells. Campbell's tale posits that a body of men is exactly the same. Once its members succumb to paranoia and lose the essential capacity to work together it "cannot be re-established".⁴⁵ This is the key to the alien's deadly strategy: it infiltrates the colony and isolates its members from one another, thereby destroying it from within just as if it were a single living organism. This biological metaphor can be extended to Antarctica itself: if the alien is seen as a virus which has infected the body of this pristine white continent then the scientists of Big Magnet are its natural defences, and must proceed to eliminate it before its

⁴³ 'Who Goes There?', p 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p 38.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

corruption spreads. In the end, it is the creature's own disintegrative capacity which gives the tale's resourceful hero, McReady, his method for exposing it. Just as the alien entity has broken down the body of the colony, both literally and figuratively, by digesting half of its members and turning the rest against each other, McReady's counterattack exploits the survival instinct of its most basic constituent particles, forcing it into revealing itself so that it can finally be killed. [Fig. 55]



Fig 55: McReady fights back. An original illustration for 'Who Goes There?,' *Astounding Science Fiction*, August 1938

As noted above, Leane has argued that the Antarctic setting of 'Who Goes There?' is crucial to understanding Campbell's text. She proposes that the frequent depiction of the continent "as an engulfing, amorphous, threatening body"⁴⁶ in exploration narratives as well as earlier works of fiction is mirrored in the alien's "shapeshifting, absorbing

⁴⁶ 'Locating the Thing' p 229.

nature”.⁴⁷ As intriguing and original as Leane’s reading is, her interpretation of the alien as an avatar of the South Polar Regions does not entirely reflect their ambiguous representation in the tale. First of all, Campbell does not so much portray the far-southern landscape as a vast and monstrous creature but as a hostile, unchanging realm of “white death”.⁴⁸ Early on, he describes the continent as wracked by “a needle-fingered cold”⁴⁹ capable of “sucking heat from any warm thing”.⁵⁰ It is a place whose combination of gales, blizzards and sub-zero temperatures is so deadly that “[i]f a man stepped out of the tunnels that connected each of the camp buildings beneath the surface, he’d be lost in ten paces”.⁵¹ In this way, Campbell makes it seem obvious that men should have come to Antarctica to study the heavens, since its closest comparable environment is the vacuum of outer space.

Rather than simply consuming and destroying living beings as Leane suggests, the tale also reveals that the Antarctic has the power to preserve them. The unique conditions which make this “savage country”⁵² so lethal to humans are the very thing that has kept the alien alive and enabled it to revive, as if it had merely been asleep for the preceding millennia. Leane’s contention that there is an affinity between this creature and the Antarctic landscape appears to be reinforced by the fact that it happened to become ensnared within the influence of the South Magnetic Pole. At the same time, its landing in the Antarctic is also highly fortuitous, since it gave mankind its only chance for survival. Had it crashed anywhere else but in the South Polar Regions, the creature would have easily overrun the Earth millions of years before the human race even evolved. Therefore, instead of existing in an analogous relationship with the alien entity, the Antarctic clearly has a much more paradoxical significance in Campbell’s tale.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ ‘Who Goes There?’ p 23.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid, p 22.

If not an extension of the dominant characteristics of the Antarctic, what is the Thing? Before the alien itself can be analyzed, the wider set of concepts which surround it must be considered. The argument about the safety of the otherworldly corpse [Fig. 56] sees some of the most basic tenets of science subjected to intense scrutiny. By way of this discussion, Campbell's tale raises three troubling questions: do we fully understand what we mean by the term life; is it even possible to make absolute distinctions between animate and inanimate matter; are there any fundamental qualities that distinguish human beings from all the other manifestations of life on Earth? As the tale proceeds, the obvious answers to these questions grow steadily more uncertain.



Fig. 56: Unleashing the alien. Illustration for ‘Who Goes There?,’ *Astounding Science-Fiction*, August 1938

One of Campbell's polar researchers notes that human muscle cells, hairs and fingernails continue to grow beyond death; does this mean that the subject is, in some

sense, still alive?⁵³ Another character mentions that certain species of fish can be fully revived after being frozen. If, according to science, they were dead prior to this, does this therefore mean they have returned to life?⁵⁴ The evolutionary divide between ‘higher’ organisms such as *Homo sapiens* and simpler ones like birds, reptiles and plants appears enormous, and yet on a genetic level the difference is nowhere near as great as we would like to imagine. The base physician makes the point that if one accepts that “[p]otential life is like atomic energy – there, but nobody can get it out”,⁵⁵ then the universe contains countless phenomena which could be said to possess life, even though they are not life-forms. Consequently, all of these examples demonstrate that the scientific definition of life is too narrow even to explain the complexities of what exists on Earth, let alone what might be found on other planets.

These questions are perplexing enough in themselves, but they merely constitute the background to what Pyne has described as the tale’s central “cerebral puzzle”.⁵⁶ Campbell classified ‘Who Goes There?’ as a “mood-concept story”⁵⁷ in which the alien fulfilled the role of “a non-mechanical gadget”.⁵⁸ The main function of this ‘gadget’ is to reveal the contradictions and ambiguities underlying traditional notions of human subjectivity. After the reanimated alien is interrupted mid-transformation, the personnel of Big Magnet begin to understand the nature their enemy. The creature was in the process of assimilating a dog, but the end result of this would not have been an alien which simply looked like the dog but a creature which, according to every conventional definition, was a dog. Blair discovers that the alien has volition over the nuclei which modify its protoplasm, and can recreate another animal down to its last cell so that “not even a microscope would

⁵³ Ibid, p 39.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p 38.

⁵⁵ Ibid, p 39.

⁵⁶ *The Ice*, p 192.

⁵⁷ John W. Campbell, Jr., Introduction to *Who Goes There?*, p ix.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

have shown the difference”.⁵⁹ This means that when the entity has absorbed another living creature it is not just imitating it: in a very real sense, it has become it.

When its victim is only a dog, the Thing’s abilities seem no more than a form of trickery, akin to a chameleon’s capacity to camouflage itself or a stick insect’s potential to mimic a piece of wood. Only when it begins to replicate humans do the really horrifying implications of its polymorphic powers become clear. As well as copying their bodies, it emerges that the alien can perfectly duplicate their intellects. As one character states, these things “are more than imitations”⁶⁰ since they obtain the mind of the absorbed individual, their complete persona. The philosophical conundrum Campbell presents is an insoluble one: if a human subject is no more than a collection of thoughts, emotions, memories and behaviour patterns, is there a difference between them and a being which has come to possess those exact same qualities? Appearances can be deceiving, but if, in addition to being biologically indistinguishable, the creature also thinks, feels and reacts precisely as the original person would have, has it actually become that person? In this way, ‘Who Goes There?’ portrays individual identity as something flimsy and unstable, a mask which can pass from one entity to another.

Campbell depicts the mounting dread of this predicament most effectively when the survivors attempt to deduce who among them is now an alien. After a blood serum test is compromised [**Fig. 57**], they are faced with the appalling dilemma that not one of them can prove that they are who they claim to be. ‘Who Goes There?’ adapts a classic logical problem known as the Liar’s Paradox,⁶¹ which states that a proposition cannot be equivalent to its own negation as this would make truth and fallacy equals. All of the remaining men of Big Magnet insist that they are still human, even though it is certain that

⁵⁹ ‘Who Goes There?’ p 58.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p 111.

⁶¹ Early forms of the Liar’s Paradox have been traced back to the Greek philosophers of the 4th Century B.C. In his 1908 article ‘Mathematical Logic as Based on the Theory of Types’, Bertrand Russell outlined its various formulations and proposed his solution.

at least one of them is not. Since there is no objective way of determining the validity of any of their claims, all of them are equally unreliable. Therefore, what Campbell's tale frighteningly demonstrates is that our essential humanity, the very quality which we believe makes our species unique from all others, lies outside the scope of empirical analysis. More than a quantity of biological data, it is something intangible, indefinable and therefore forever uncertain. As one of its characters despairingly admits, "I know I'm human. I can't prove it either".⁶²



Fig. 57: Testing for the Thing. Illustration for 'Who Goes There?,' *Astounding Science Fiction*, August 1938

In examining 'Who Goes There?' it seems an obvious strategy to draw a parallel between Campbell's Thing and the most famous of all Gothic monsters, the vampire. Both have the outward appearance of a human being but can change their shape and move up and down the evolutionary scale at will, feed upon the living until there is nothing left of

⁶² 'Who Goes There?' p 86.

them, reproduce their own kind without procreating and can only be exposed and exterminated using specific techniques. Nevertheless, whereas the vampire's powers of transformation are a matter of supernatural agency there is nothing scientifically impossible about the Thing's abilities. Since, in the words of Anne Billson, it "is not bound by the laws of nature as we know them",⁶³ the only definite characteristic which can be attributed to the Thing is life: thriving, ceaselessly multiplying and totally indifferent to all other living things.

If the Thing has a true analogue in earlier Gothic literature, it is the uncanny double or *doppelgänger*. Most famously used by Robert Louis Stevenson in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and before that by Poe in numerous stories such as 'William Wilson' (1839), in these works the figure of the *doppelgänger* is a manifestation of Otherness which threatens and ultimately destroys the protagonist's sense of identity. For the psychoanalyst Otto Rank, the literary *doppelgänger* was both a projection of the protagonist's fear of death but also an alter ego devoid of the restraint which prevented the self from indulging its most primitive impulses.⁶⁴ This is the very quality which makes the Thing's capacity to imitate humans so unsettling: it is a monstrous beast which can all too easily counterfeit the ethical and rational traits which we feel set us apart from all other life-forms. However, instead of acting as a harbinger of doom, the Thing inverts this traditional characteristic of the *doppelgänger*: by the time their alien replica has been identified, the original self is already long dead.

Therefore, like the vampire, *doppelgänger* and the other archetypal monsters of Gothic literature, the most significant aspect of the Thing is what it reveals about human existence. At the beginning of Campbell's story, the men of Big Magnet are utterly

⁶³ Anne Billson, *BFI Modern Classics: The Thing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p 46.

⁶⁴ Rank uses psychoanalytic concepts to analyze the use of the figure of the *doppelgänger* in a variety of Gothic and non-Gothic literary texts in his influential work *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. Harry Tucker (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1971), p 8-34.

repulsed by the sheer Otherness of the malevolent-looking, three-eyed, blue-skinned creature they have exhumed from the ice. Blair stresses its complete alterity from every variety of terrestrial life, conjecturing that it must be “a member of a supremely intelligent race, a race that has learned the deepest secrets of biology, and turned them to its use”.⁶⁵ By the tale’s conclusion, its difference from humans has become imperceptible in more ways than one: the creature is an accumulation of cells, just like us; it eats and breeds, as do humans; its physical and mental states are in constant flux, and, exactly like a person, it can more easily be described as a process than as an entity with a fixed and permanent nature. Campbell points out this overriding similarity when one of the terrified characters asks “[How] would I know if I was a monster? Would I know if the monster had already got me?”⁶⁶

In this way, he uses the horridly confined space of the Antarctic camp much like a Petri dish, grotesquely exaggerating its claustrophobic conditions by positing an entity which can break down the most primal of all barriers which keeps one life-form isolated from another. The location is therefore absolutely vital to the tale, for in this far southern setting Campbell’s characters cannot simply abandon their camp and escape the threat of the Thing by fleeing to civilization. After all, outside Big Magnet there is only certain death. Instead, they have no choice but to remain within the station and try to fight an invader who looks every bit as human as they do. In this respect, Victoria Nelson has written that what ‘Who Goes There?’ offers is a particularly extreme example of “the Other who emerges from the Pole”,⁶⁷ a horrifying figure who in other texts would be a

⁶⁵ ‘Who Goes There?’ p 58.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p 87.

⁶⁷ Victoria Nelson, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), p 161.

projection of the “paranoid fantasies”⁶⁸ of the polar explorers but who in Campbell’s story is actually real.

As a text obsessed with the collapse of boundaries and the instability of identity, it is obvious why ‘Who Goes There?’ has been read in light of Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection. Indeed, although most of the body horror in Campbell’s original tale goes undescribed, John Carpenter’s 1982 film version is awash with spectacular abject imagery, including stomachs metamorphosing into mouths, skulls splitting open to release second heads and ichor-drenched viscera transforming into limbs. All of the Thing’s loathsome manifestations demonstrate that the essential separation we perceive between the familiar exterior and the alien interior of our bodies, the outside we recognise as ‘us’ and the insides we remain largely unaware of, does not actually exist. Andrew M. Butler⁶⁹ and Leane herself have offered insightful readings both of Carpenter’s film and Campbell’s story as works which abound in representations of abjection, with the latter arguing that Kristeva’s theory acts as “a particularly useful lens”⁷⁰ for analyzing these texts. Since it features an entity which vigorously overturns the traditional conception of subjectivity, ‘Who Goes There?’ can equally be used to illuminate Kristeva’s ideas.

In the previous chapter, the theory of abjection was used to examine the Shoggoths in *Mountains of Madness*, but whereas Lovecraft’s monstrosities were defined by their shapelessness and complete dissimilarity from other life-forms we have seen that the Thing can manifest itself as any creature or person it desires. Nevertheless, its adoption of these guises is only temporary, and it inevitably undergoes another transformation. According to Kristeva’s theory, the experience of the abject is disconcerting because it reminds us that our identity is formed through our symbolic relationship with the outer world. She states

⁶⁸ Ibid, p 156.

⁶⁹ Andrew M. Butler, ‘Abjection and *The Thing*’ *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association*, 213 (September-October 2000), p 10-13.

⁷⁰ ‘Locating the Thing’ p 230.

that it occurs most intensely when the subject “weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it is none other than abject”.⁷¹ The fluids and matter expelled from our bodies blur the margins of selfhood, exposing them as permeable. As Kristeva writes, the abject is made up of “[t]he in-between, the ambiguous, the composite”,⁷² and is attended by “a terror that disassembles”.⁷³

In this sense, Campbell’s alien organism is the very essence of abjection since it reveals the constructedness of subjectivity and entirely erases the already indefinite demarcation between what is internal and external. Kristeva notes that human identity is always conceived in terms of the relationship between the subject and object, and the Thing reflects this to an even greater degree since it can quite literally become whatever lies outside of it. If, as Kristeva states, the abject must be thought of as “Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either”,⁷⁴ then the Thing embodies it through its abolition of the basic division between Self and Other. Like a human it ejects waste material, but in its case what it casts aside is a constant succession of former bodies. It lives in an unending state of transition, never fully what it appears to be and always in the process of becoming something else. No more than a perpetually rearranging mass of protoplasm, its volatile, ever-changing existence is only a more ghastly and extreme version of our own.

Halfway through his tale, Campbell raises the question of what the alien’s ultimate intentions might be. It is evidently the perfect predator because “[i]t has no natural enemies, because it becomes whatever it wants to”,⁷⁵ but what does it want with the far more primitive creatures of the Earth? The answer is terrifyingly simple: the Thing’s aim is

⁷¹ Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p 5.

⁷² Ibid, p 4.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p 2.

⁷⁵ ‘Who Goes There?’ p 59.

to colonise the entire planet with an infinite number of forms of itself, or as one character theorises “to become the population of the world”.⁷⁶ Since it has no identity of its own and must continue to duplicate other entities in order to be anything, it will go on absorbing every last molecule of living matter until it is the only thing that exists. It has the potential not simply to enslave mankind but to “*be all Earth’s inhabitants*”,⁷⁷ or as one character puts it to “[s]et itself up as a lone dictator”.⁷⁸ In other words, its goal is to create a world totally devoid of any authentic difference, and dominate it as both a unity and a multitude.

The implications of Campbell’s profoundly horrifying concept of a world of being characterised by absolute unanimous sameness prefigure in several respects the attempts by modern thinkers to move beyond traditional models of knowledge. In particular, the philosopher Dylan Trigg has used the tale, as well as Carpenter’s film, as part of a radical re-examination of the foundations of phenomenal reality. Building upon the work of the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Trigg contends that the body rather than the mind is the locus of all reality. Our body exists before we become a conscious subject, and persists beyond the lifespan of the self. In Trigg’s words, “organic existence, far from being subservient to the intellect, is in fact the primary constituent of the intellect, such that ‘mind’ is an offspring of the persistence of matter”.⁷⁹ As beings ineluctably in-the-world, it is our corporeality which permits us to engage with what he terms “the unhuman realm”⁸⁰ of noumena in which we are inextricably located but which we never obtain a direct experience of.

Therefore, instead of being thought of as something which we inhabit or as an instrument which we use, this view of things posits that we *are* our bodies. Trigg notes that by abandoning “the classical concept of identity that places a sanction on the independence

⁷⁶ Ibid, p 58.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p 60.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p 58.

⁷⁹ Dylan Trigg, *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2014), p 144.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p 146.

of the flesh”⁸¹ this produces a strange, defamiliarized vision of the body as made up entirely of “foreign matter, [and] alien tissue”.⁸² Corporeal existence is redefined as the manifestation of an autonomous, formless flesh which stands in a mysterious, liminal relationship to the world of objects and yet is the seat of all lived experience. As a result, Trigg sees the constantly reconfiguring, all-consuming alien of Campbell’s tale as providing an array of insights into this new conception of being. He observes that the thing “is less a creature and more a composite of different life-forms arbitrarily bound by being constituted from the same elemental stuff: *flesh*”.⁸³ Given that it lacks “a substance of its own, much less a discernible appearance, the thing doesn’t simply duplicate other life-forms, but actively negates them as it begins the process of assimilation”.⁸⁴ At the same time, he argues that the organism “is horrifying and horrific not because of its alienness, but because we are already at the scene of anxiety, caught up in that formless flesh which is not a passive backdrop against which real life takes place, but is precisely the site where life is composed and duplicated”.⁸⁵ Once again, what we find most monstrous about it are the ways in which it resembles us.

If, as entities defined by our liminal state, our subjectivity is contingent upon what is not us, then it is possible to read ‘Who Goes There?’ as presenting a challenging thought-experiment. Campbell’s alien is not an explorer or a scientist. It has no desire to comprehend what lies beyond itself, only to destroy all forms of Otherness. As we have seen, the Thing’s goal is to rid the Earth of all alterity and reduce everything to itself. Therefore, this raises a number of intriguing questions about what kind of an existence it will have if it succeeds. If authentic being arises from the primordial difference between us and what exists outside of us, can it be regarded as an actual entity or just a mass of

⁸¹ Ibid, p 137.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p 138.

⁸⁵ Ibid, p 139.

anonymous matter? Since alterity is its source material, how will the Thing even constitute itself once the last trace of everything that is not it has been eradicated? If it only possesses the thoughts of the entity it is imitating, how will its thoughts be structured and what will it be able to think about when everything has finally been assimilated? Even though Campbell's tale does not directly ask these questions, Trigg maintains that its depiction of this uncanny organism is invaluable for it clarifies our feelings of estrangement from our own bodies by allowing us to "gain a sense of the body as the site of another life".⁸⁶

To conclude this chapter, it is important to briefly assess how the two film versions of Campbell's tale have perpetuated the Antarctic Gothic subgenre. In the case of the first of these adaptations, *The Thing From Another World* (1951), its impact was undermined by the fact that it not only changed the setting of Campbell's tale from the South to North Polar Regions, but also heavily altered the central dynamic of its plot. Instead of depicting the infectious paranoia and mistrust which takes hold of the base's population, director Christian Nyby (who, it is commonly agreed, was simply taking instruction from the film's real auteur, Howard Hawks⁸⁷) sets up a more conventional conflict between the commonsense forces of the military and science's dangerously irrepressible curiosity. Something which would obviously have posed too great of a challenge for the technical wizards of the period, the film also jettison's Campbell's shape-shifting alien. It substitutes a seven foot tall humanoid, who is found to be an evolved form of vegetable. A giant, unemotional sexless being, this creature is depicted as a modern-day Frankenstein's monster, the type of perfect human that modern science (embodied in this film by the chillingly rational Dr. Carrington) wishes to replace us with.

Fortunately, Campbell's tale received a far more sympathetic and technically impressive treatment from acclaimed director John Carpenter just over thirty years later.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p 9.

⁸⁷ In their critical studies, both Billson and Conolly state that Nyby was merely the film's nominal director as it was really the work of Hawks.

Indeed, although it received sensationally scathing reviews upon its first release, Billson has stated that *The Thing* (1982) has since come to be recognised “as not just one of the greatest horror movies of all time, but as something of a *Gesamt Kunstwerk* of the genre”.⁸⁸ As Billson written, the film represents “a mighty convergence of all the horror and science fiction trends of several decades”⁸⁹ and is a work in which “[p]aranoia, body horror, group politics and vital questions of human identity are spliced into a single throbbing entity”.⁹⁰ The reason why Carpenter’s *The Thing* has come to receive such high praise is because it adheres extremely closely to its source material, and reinstates all of the aspects missing from the previous adaptation of Campbell’s story, above all its Antarctic setting. [Fig. 58, 59, 60]



Fig. 58, 59: The Gothicised Antarctic Explorer: Cover art for the novelisation of Carpenter’s film by Alan Dean Foster and unused poster art by Drew Struzan

⁸⁸ *BFI Modern Classics: The Thing*, p 13. Billson’s book itself was a key text in changing the reputation of the film, since it was one of the first British Film Institute studies devoted to a horror movie.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.



Fig. 60: Drew Struzan's iconic final poster artwork for John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982)

The key to the film's success is that it finds a visual language which perfectly matches the escalating tension of the tale. Such unforgettable images as the row of anonymously swathed and masked men warily watching each other beneath the endless darkness of the polar sky, the crazed, half-frozen hero threatening the group with dynamite held in front of a flamethrower, and the final hunt for the invader through subterranean ice caverns bathed in the weird pink light of flares brilliantly capture Antarctica's uniqueness as a Gothic locale. Its realization of the Thing itself, a living, breathing and truly loathsome

monstrosity, also remains a master class in special effects work. Given its number of astonishingly gruesome scenes and its portrayal of the dreadful isolation of those who work in the far south, it is somewhat surprising that Carpenter's film has been enthusiastically embraced by the continent's actual inhabitants and has become a part of its very culture. Each February, the film is screened at the Amundsen-Scott South Pole Station to mark the commencement of the overwintering period.⁹¹ Not for the first time in the field of the Antarctic Gothic, the real and the unreal have become difficult to tell apart.

⁹¹ See *Devil's Advocates: The Thing*, p 81.

Conclusion

In the spring of 2017, an issue of *The Irish Times*¹ included a brochure for a travel company offering suggestions for potential holiday destinations. Among the traditional resorts advertised were Tenerife, Majorca and the Algarve, but one of the brochure's more incongruous inclusions was a cruise of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and Antarctica. Over the course of twenty-six nights, tourists could participate in a range of unique polar activities: they could visit the penguin colonies on the Antarctic Peninsula; watch the giant orcas off the shoreline of South Georgia; go on sightseeing expeditions to the majestic glaciers of Paradise Harbour and the spectacular straits of the Lemaire Channel; camp under the stars on the Antarctic mainland itself, and make a journey to Deception Island, the still active volcanic landmass originally sighted by William Smith and Edward Bransfield in January 1820 and first explored later that year by the man who gave it its name, Nathaniel Palmer.

Antarctica's transition from an ambiguous elemental region which had barely known a human presence by the start of the twentieth century to a thriving tourist destination has certainly accelerated in recent years. In 2005, the author Jeff Rubin contributed a volume on Antarctica to the well-known series of *Lonely Planet* travel guides, in which he described the continent as "a giant natural wonder".² Rubin states that for the more ambitious and unconventional traveller, a journey to the far south represents a rare opportunity to experience "a wilderness unsullied by humans"³ and one which contains "some extra-special places of exceptional beauty".⁴ The Antarctic's ever-increasing attraction for tourists is demonstrated by the fact that a revised edition of this guide was published in 2012 and another is due to appear in December 2017. Indeed, over

¹ *Abbey Travel* brochure, *The Irish Times*, 25th March 2017.

² Jeff Rubin, *Antarctica: Lonely Planet Guide* (London: Lonely Planet Books, 2005), p 12.

³ *Ibid*, p 7.

⁴ *Ibid*.

five thousand people visit the continent each year (a high number given its relatively short tourist season, the small number of visitors which can be accommodated at any one time, and the prohibitive cost of such an excursion) and this figure has risen annually.⁵

If planning a journey to the South Polar Regions now involves nothing more than making a simple online booking, does this mean that the enigmatic mystique of this realm has been completely consigned to the past? Moreover, what are the implications of this development for the Antarctic Gothic? I shall now conclude my analysis of this subgenre with a consideration of its future. In doing so, I will briefly examine two contemporary works which I believe match the criteria of the Antarctic Gothic. These novels succeed in reviving the tradition of speculative fictions set in the far south, and also use the Gothic mode to engage with some of the most urgent questions now facing humanity. To focus first of all on the contested subject of whether the Antarctic is still capable of supporting Gothic narratives, Stephen J. Pyne has put forward the argument that this has not been the case for quite some time.

In *The Ice*, Pyne claims that the age of polar Gothic literature was necessarily coincident with the period in which the Arctic and Antarctic were still being explored. By the time these regions had been successively mapped, charted and photographically documented, they had been thoroughly demystified and he believes it was no longer possible for them to engender the same kind of imaginative responses which they had before. Pyne observes that “[o]nce Antarctica and the ocean basins had been explored, there were no unvisited geographies within which to set a lost civilization”.⁶ As a result, he explains that “fantasy writing had to resurrect old problems, tour other planets, or plunge into the depths of the human soul”.⁷ After all the determination and ingenuity it had taken

⁵ Ibid, p 9. The Antarctic tourist season lasts from November to February. The average cost of an Antarctic cruise is £15,000.

⁶ Stephen J. Pyne, *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003), p 194.

⁷ Ibid.

to uncover it and all the strange and wondrous topographies it had inspired, Pyne argues that the revelation that the far south was no more than a sterile wasteland marked the “dead ends”⁸ of both kinds of activity.

Pyne’s contention that the process of exploration itself effectively put an end to the Polar Imaginary initially appears persuasive. In relation to the Antarctic Gothic, he writes that Lovecraft’s *At the Mountains of Madness* had temporarily “revived old curiosities”.⁹ However, he asserts that its true function as a work of literature amounted to “tidying up a mystery”¹⁰ which had originated with *Arthur Gordon Pym*, and in a manner which paralleled the efforts of figures like Byrd “who sought to complete the geographic exploration of Antarctica begun by Poe’s contemporaries”.¹¹ There is little doubt that following Byrd’s Second Antarctic Expedition and the publication of Campbell’s ‘Who Goes There?’ in the late 1930s, speculative fictions of any kind featuring the far south became increasingly rare.¹² Nevertheless, Pyne may be overstating the case when he maintains that Antarctica simply ceased to have any potential as a Gothic territory after the last of its unseen spaces was revealed by science.

Turning briefly to the opposite end of the Earth, Michelle Paver’s *Dark Matter: A Ghost Story* (2010) has been among the most popular and critically acclaimed works of supernatural fiction of the last decade.¹³ Paver’s novel (which, conforming to the Polar Gothic tradition, takes the form of an exploration account) follows a British Arctic expedition which crosses the Barents Sea to Gruhuken, a fictional bay on the North East coast of the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard. Eventually, the expedition dwindles until the narrator is left alone to face the oncoming polar night and finds himself menaced by a

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² An interesting exception is Dennis Wheatley’s novel *The Man Who Missed the War* (1945). Although not a Gothic fiction, it is set in the Antarctic and features giant crabs, a race of leprechauns and the psychic descendants of the inhabitants of Atlantis who are now out to use weather control to take over the planet.

¹³ It was nominated for a Shirley Jackson Award in 2010, and has sold over a million copies internationally.

terrifying force which may or may not be a manifestation of his own overwrought imagination.¹⁴ *Dark Matter* is set in 1937, almost three decades after Robert Peary made his controversial claim to have reached the North Pole and eleven years after Roald Amundsen's first fully verified expedition. Paver has written that she chose this Arctic region as her setting since it alternates between two extremes, and varies from being a place "teeming with life and perpetual sunlight"¹⁵ to one of "dead stillness and perpetual dark".¹⁶ In other words, even though the Arctic has now been as comprehensively mapped as any other location on the planet, Paver's novel demonstrates that it has retained its power to stimulate the imagination.

While Paver's *Dark Matter* is an archetypal psychological horror story which attests to her admiration for such authors as M.R. James and Sheridan Le Fanu,¹⁷ two recent works of imaginative fiction featuring the far south reflect the more formally experimental, hybrid nature of Antarctic Gothic fiction. These are *The Thing Itself* (2015) by Adam Roberts and *Shackleton's Man Goes South* (2013) by Tony White. Roberts' novel signifies its connection to the subgenre in its very title, which intentionally evokes that of John Carpenter's film. However, his plot also replicates some of the basic elements of Campbell's story upon which that film was based. The setting of its central narrative is an isolated scientific research station located deep within the Antarctic interior. Its purpose is to probe the universe for signs of intelligent life, work which can only be conducted in a location as far removed from man-made forms of interference as possible. Like 'Who Goes There?', Roberts' novel also masterfully depicts the tense living conditions of the human beings manning this cramped outpost, of whom there are only two, and reveals how the

¹⁴ In this regard, Paver's novel shares a number of similarities with Leahy's 'In Amundsen's Tent' (1928) discussed in chapter four.

¹⁵ Michelle Paver, afterword to *Dark Matter: A Ghost Story* (London: Orion, 2010) p 262.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid, p 261.

oppressive cold and monotony of the polar environment relentlessly gnaws away at their sanity.

This situation becomes infinitely worse when the last of the light fades away, leaving the two protagonists in a landscape of shadows and hundreds of miles from the nearest human settlement. However, the narrator, Charles Gardner, observes that even the Antarctic night is unnatural compared to that found anywhere else. He states that “[f]or the first couple of weeks the sky lightens twice a day, pretty much bright enough to walk around without a torch – the same dawn and dusk paling of the sky that precedes sunrise and follows sunset, only without actual dawn and dusk... As the weeks go on this gets briefer and darker, and then you do have a month or so when it’s basically coal-coloured skies and darkness invisible the whole time”.¹⁸ At this point the sun has also set on the rational world, for it is during this period of total darkness that Gardner’s companion in Antarctica, Roy Curtius, secretly goes insane.

Obsessed with Fermi’s Paradox (which poses the question why, if the cosmos contains countless planets where life must have evolved aeons ago, the Earth has not already been visited by extraterrestrials?), Curtius now believes he has found a way to solve it. After Curtius drugs him and locks him outside, Gardner undergoes a terrifying ordeal as the sensory deprivation brought on by the absolute darkness of the Antarctic night takes effect. Lying on the ice ten degrees of latitude from the Pole itself, his mind slowly peels away layers of experience until all he is aware of is “[c]old. That was the thing. That was what had crept up on me. That’s what’s behind the veil. Endless, implacable, killing cold. Even the most cursory examination of the cosmos confirms this”.¹⁹ As he rapidly begins to freeze to death, Gardner finds himself overwhelmed by

¹⁸ Adam Roberts, *The Thing Itself* (London: Gollancz, 2015), p 11.

¹⁹ Ibid, p 22.

“[d]ata experiences of a radically new kind”.²⁰ These bizarre visions take the form of something which “felt, or looked, like a great tumbling of scree down an endless slope. Or rubble gathering at the bottom and falling up a mountain. Forwards, backwards. It was the most terrifying thing I ever saw”.²¹ It lacks any definite form, but Gardner is convinced that it is alive.

Disfigured from frostbite but still clinging to life, when Gardner asks Curtius about the nightmarish phenomena the answer he receives seems impossible. The madman believes that, by exploiting the unique conditions of the Antarctic, he has managed to strip Gardner’s mind of the categories of time and space which the philosopher Immanuel Kant believed gave structure to perception and were the necessary preconditions of all human experience and knowledge. In this way, he believes he has given Gardner a vision of pure, unmediated reality, a glimpse of what Kant termed the Thing-in-Itself, and has revealed to him the literally unimaginable alien entities which secretly populate our realm. As much as Gardner cannot bring himself to accept that what he witnessed was anything other than “a series of weird hallucinations brought on by the extreme cold and the blood supply becoming intermittent in my brain”,²² he grows haunted by the idea that Curtius may have been telling him the truth.

Although *The Thing Itself* eventually weaves together a multitude of narratives set in different locations and time periods, Gardner’s phantasmagoric ‘encounter’ on the lethal Antarctic surface is the thematic centre of Roberts’ novel. The indeterminacy which surrounds this experience “on the underside of the world”²³ means that it can be interpreted in any number of ways: Was Gardner merely wandering in some ambiguous dreamscape as his delirious brain succumbed to the freezing polar temperatures, or has he been granted a

²⁰ Ibid, p 25.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, p 30.

²³ Ibid, p 64.

vision of a spiritual world beyond the material plane? Did Curtius actually remove the spatio-temporal perceptions shielding his mind from the realm of noumena, or were the spectral ‘things’ which Gardner beheld authentic alien beings trying to make contact? Did any of this really happen at all, or is Gardner’s account nothing more than the duplicitous ramblings of a failed scientist who has descended into alcoholism?

As with many of the Antarctic Gothic texts already discussed, the deliberate elusiveness of meaning in *The Thing Itself* is part of the author’s narrative strategy. The scientists of the polar research station are engaged in a search for knowledge which spans the entire cosmos, but Roberts depicts our very existence in this world and the functioning of our intellects as phenomena we are still incapable of fully understanding. Reality is just a field of mutable constructs generated by the psyche, concealing from us a world of things we can never truly apprehend. As Gardner explains, “the first, and most important thing I learned from my Antarctic experience [was that] the brain is a complex machine, and once you’ve dinged it, it will tend to throw weird shapes and glitches into your thoughts”.²⁴ Therefore, *The Thing Itself* harkens back to the earlier works in the Antarctic Gothic subgenre, since it uses the South Polar Regions to represent the boundary and threshold of all human knowledge which mankind still feels compelled to overcome. In Roberts’ novel, the unassimilably vast Antarctic landscape becomes a metaphor for the greatest *terra incognita* of them all, the eternally hidden realm of numinous objects.

In his article ‘Facing Future Climate Change’ (2008), the climatologist Luke Skinner has written that it can no longer be taken for granted that human civilization will continue to exist “within a warm and relatively stable climatic context”.²⁵ On the contrary, he states that there is now a growing scientific consensus that “global temperatures are

²⁴ Ibid, p 49.

²⁵ Luke Skinner, ‘Facing Future Climate Change,’ *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, Vol. 366, No. 1885, (London: Royal Society, 2008), p 4632.

rising”,²⁶ and that “this increase and attendant impacts are attributable to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions”.²⁷ Of the factors of greatest concern for experts is the “increasingly worrying rate of Greenland Ice Sheet and West Antarctic Ice Sheet destruction”.²⁸ If global temperatures continue to escalate due to human action, Skinner notes that “a threshold amount of Antarctic warming could play a triggering role”²⁹ in creating a cycle of extreme weather patterns, which will in turn result in a variety of unprecedentedly destructive scenarios. The quantity of water which currently exists in a frozen state in Antarctica is so enormous that if temperatures increase in accordance with even the most conservative of current projections, the Earth’s ocean levels will rise significantly. This means that the human race will be confronted with a number of “veritable catastrophes”.³⁰

Although climate change has only become a matter of public discourse since the start of this century, some of the first figures to recognise this phenomenon were polar scientists. In 2013 the author Tony White was researching the history of climatology in the archives of London’s Science Museum, where he was then writer in residence. In a 1911 issue of *The South Polar Times*, he discovered a short story entitled ‘FRAGMENTS OF A MANUSCRIPT FOUND BY THE PEOPLE OF SIRIUS WHEN THEY VISITED THE EARTH DURING THE EXPLORATION OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM’ by George Clarke Simpson, who was the meteorologist on Scott’s ‘Terra Nova’ Expedition and became a pioneering figure in the field. Supposedly written by the last survivor of the human race, Simpson’s dystopian tale describes how mankind’s industrial exploitation of the Earth has led to irreversible climate change, which will ultimately render it uninhabitable. The planet has entered a final ice age from which it will never emerge.

²⁶ Ibid, p 4628.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, p 4635.

²⁹ Ibid, p 4632.

³⁰ Ibid, p 4635.

Fascinated by Simpson's prescient tale, White used it as the basis for his own speculative fiction. *Shackleton's Man Goes South* projects a horrific world where the oceans have risen catastrophically, and the Antarctic not only now possesses a temperate climate but is also one of the last places on Earth still above water. South Georgia has become a squalid sanctuary for refugees from all over the globe known as Patience Camp, and is the place where those destined for Antarctica must wait before they journey to what was once the great white continent. A fearful mother and daughter have made their way across the Southern Ocean, after placing their lives in the hands of a mercurial ship's captain. As an ever greater number of the remnants of humanity take shelter at Patience Camp and conditions there deteriorate, the refugees begin to grow ever more uneasy about why they have not been transported onward to their final destination.

This may, or may not, be the real plot of White's novel. Like many of the other Antarctic Gothic texts analyzed in this thesis, it contains a number of nested narratives which all cast doubt upon each other's authenticity. In particular, he uses the technique of the found manuscript in a deliberate homage to William Hope Hodgson's Gothic novel, *The House on the Borderland* (1908). The appalling future Antarctica which White vividly envisages may in fact be a fantasy of one of the character's in his text. In this way, White plays with the notion that the impending disaster many have predicted is not inevitable, but may be avoided if human attitudes towards the environment change and we begin to treat it more responsibly. To drive this point home, he intersperses the episodes of his unsettling story with a series of interviews with leading climatologists, which are equally as terrifying as the fiction itself. They offer up a series of apocalyptic visions of the world mankind will create in only a few decades if we continue to abuse it as we have for the past century. As one of the scientists states, "a clearer record of climate change is available from the Poles

than from anywhere else”³¹ so any deterioration of Antarctica will give humanity a direct indication of its destiny.

In this sense, both Roberts and White’s varying representations of the far south as what Andrew Smith and William Hughes term an “ecological dead zone”³² have seen the Antarctic Gothic subgenre return to its original preoccupation with the estrangement of nature. In their novels, as in the very earliest fictions considered in this thesis, the Polar Regions act as a metaphor for a natural world and are depicted as inconceivably vast and overwhelmingly destructive. It is a realm in which the human race may continue to survive but not somewhere we ever actually belong. As Catherine Lanone observes, more recent ecologically themed Gothic narratives have demonstrated that “[t]he lessons of the past come to haunt the present, suggesting that man should acknowledge technological hubris and...learn to recoil from the sweet poison of progress”.³³ If not, the rest of the globe will eventually become as lifeless and inhospitable as the Arctic and Antarctic.

In his book *In the Dust of This Planet* (2012), the philosopher Eugene Thacker has written that “[t]he world is increasingly unthinkable”³⁴ mostly because we live in an age in which we are constantly made conscious of “the always looming threat of our extinction”.³⁵ He goes on to explain that we are “more and more aware of the world in which we live as a non-human world, a world outside, one that is manifest in the effects of global climate change, natural disasters, the energy crisis, and the progressive extinction of species world-wide”.³⁶ For all these reasons, we are now drawn towards what he describes as a “speculative *world-without-us*”,³⁷ a concept of the Earth as it shall be after we have

³¹ Tony White, *Shackleton’s Man Goes South* (London: The Science Museum, 2013), p 55.

³² Andrew Smith and William Hughes ed., *Ecogothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p 2.

³³ Catherine Lanone, ‘Monsters on Ice and Global Warming: from Mary Shelley and Sir John Franklin to Margaret Atwood and Dan Simmons,’ in *Ecogothic*, p 28.

³⁴ Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy Vol.1* (Alesford: Zero Books, 2011), p 1.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, p 2.

³⁷ Ibid, p 5, italics in original.

ceased to exist. This, perhaps, is what Antarctica has always given us, and what it can continue to represent in literary texts: a vision of an alien world which is also our own, one which has been indifferent to us for most of its long history and may forget that we ever existed, a great blank whiteness upon which we can project our dreams and nightmares.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Beaver, Harold, ed. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* by Edgar Allan Poe, (London: Penguin, 1975)
- *The Science-Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe*, (London: Penguin, 1976)
- Campbell, John W., Jr., *Who Goes There?* (London: Gollancz 2011)
- ‘Who Goes There?’ (United States: Rocket Ride Books, 2009)
- Clark-Russell, William, *The Frozen Pirate* (Tunbridge Wells: Solis Press, 2016)
- Frank, Frederick S., and Long Hoeveler, Diane, ed. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* by Edgar Allan Poe (Toronto: Broadview Editions, 2010)
- Harrison, J.A., ed. *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. VIII: Literary Criticism* (New York: T.Y. Crowell, 1902)
- Kennedy, J. Gerald, ed. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket and Related Tales* by Edgar Allan Poe, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
- *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, (London: Penguin, 2006)
- Leahy, John M., ‘In Amundsen’s Tent’ in Bill Manhire ed. *The Wide White Page: Writer’s Imagine Antarctica* (Victoria: Victoria University Press, 2004)
- Lovecraft, H.P., ‘At the Mountains of Madness’ in Roger Luckhurst ed. *H.P. Lovecraft: The Classic Horror Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Mabbott, Thomas O., ed. *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, Vol. 1-3 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969-1978)
- Miéville, China, ed. H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness* (New York: The Modern Library, 2005)

- Pollin, Burton, ed. *The Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe Vol. 1 – The Imaginary Voyages: The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall, The Journal of Julius Rodman* (Boston: Twayne, 1981).
- Quinn, Patrick F., ed. *Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales* (New York: Library of America, 1984)
- Thompson, G.R., ed. *Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews* (New York: Library of America, 1984)
- ed. *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Norton Critical Editions, 2004)
- Verne, Jules, *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras*, Edited and Translated by William Butcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)
- *The Sphinx of the Ice Realm* Edited and Translated by Frederick Walter Paul (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012)

Secondary Sources

Abbey Travel brochure, *The Irish Times*, 25th March 2017

Abbot, Edwin, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1975)

Achilles, Jochen, and Bergmann, Ina, eds. *Liminality and the Short Story: Boundary Crossing in American, Canadian, and British Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2015)

Airaksinen, Timo, *The Philosophy of H.P. Lovecraft: The Route to Horror* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999)

Anonymous, 'The New President of the Royal Geographical Society', *The Times*, November 14th 1893.

Anonymous, 'The Unknown Continent', *The Times*, November 12th 1895.

Anonymous, 'The Renewal of Antarctic Exploration' *The Times*, April 12th 1897.

Anonymous, 'An Antarctic Conference', *The Times*, July 7th 1897.

Anonymous, 'National Antarctic Expedition,' *The Times*, June 23rd 1899.

Anonymous, 'Captain Scott's Expedition', *The Times*, April 2nd 1912.

Anonymous, 'Polar Exploration: Lord Curzon on the Scott Expedition', *The Times*, May 27th 1913.

Anonymous, 'Captain Scott's Relics: Exhibition At Earl's Court,' *The Times*, June 27th 1913.

Arcudi, John, Somerville, Jim, Garvey, Brian, Jones, Robert, and Starkings, Richard, *The Thing from Another World: Climate of Fear* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 1992)

Asimov, Isaac, Greenberg, Martin H., and Waugh, Charles G., eds. *The Mammoth Book of Short Science Fiction Novels* (London: Robinson, 1986)

- Baldick, Chris and Morrison, Robert, ed. *Tales of Terror from Blackwood's Magazine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
- Barczewski, Stephanie L., *Antarctic Destinies: Scott, Shackleton, and the Changing Face of Heroism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007)
- Behrmann, Bridget, "Éclat: Duality and the Absolute in *Voyages et adventures du Capitaine Hatteras*" *Verniana: Jules Verne Studies*, Vol 7 (2014-15).
- Billson, Anne, *BFI Modern Classics: The Thing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)
- Bloom, Clive, *Gothic Horror: A Guide for Students and Readers*, 2nd Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)
- Blum, Hester, 'John Cleves Symmes and the Planetary Reach of Polar Exploration', *American Literature*, June 2012, Vol. 84, No. 2.
- Boothby, Guy, *Dr. Nikola – Victorian Master Criminal* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2009)
- Borges, Jorge Luis, *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986* (London: Penguin, 2001)
- Botting, Fred, *The Gothic* (London: Routledge, 2014)
- Botting, Fred, and Townshend, Dale, eds. *Gothic: Critical Concepts in Literary and Cultural Studies Vol. 1* (London: Routledge, 2004)
- Bould, Mark, Butler, Andrew, Roberts, Adam, and Vint, Sheryl, eds. *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2009)
- Bova, Ben, ed., *The Science-Fiction Hall of Fame* (New York: Doubleday, 1973)
- Bowman, Isaiah, 'Antarctica' in *The Scientific Monthly*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (April 1930)
- Brandt, Anthony, *The Man Who Ate His Boots: Sir John Franklin and the Tragic History of the Northwest Passage* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2011)
- Butler, Andrew M., 'Abjection and *The Thing*' *Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association*, 213 (September-October 2000)

- Byrd, Richard E., *Discovery: The Story of the Second Byrd Antarctic Expedition* (London: Putnam, 1936)
- *Little America: Aerial Exploration in the Antarctic, The Flight to the South Pole* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1930)
- *Skyward: Man's Mastery of the Air* (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 2015)
- Campbell, John W., Jr., *Who Goes There?* (New York: Shasta Publishing, 1948)
- Carlson, Eric W. ed. *The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism since 1829* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1970)
- Carringer, Robert L., 'Circumscription of Space and the Form of Poe's *Arthur Gordon Pym*,' *PMLA* 89 (1974)
- Chelebourg, Christian, ed. *Jules Verne 6: "Le Science en question"* (Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1992)
- Cherry-Garrard, Apsley, Sara Wheeler ed. *The Worst Journey in the World: Antarctica 1910-13* (London: Pimlico, 2003)
- Clarke, Graham, ed. *Edgar Allan Poe: Critical Assessments Vol.1-4* (Sussex: Helm Information, 1991)
- Conolly, Jez, *Devil's Advocates: The Thing* (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2014)
- Cook, Frederick A., *Through the First Antarctic Night: 1898-1899* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1980)
- Cook, Captain James, Ernest Rhys and Simon Marshall eds. *The Voyages of Captain Cook* (London: Wordsworth Editions, 1999)
- Cook, Captain James, Philip Edwards ed. *The Journals* (London: Penguin, 1999)
- Cordes, Fauno Lancaster, "'Tekeli-li" or Hollow Earth Lives': *A Bibliography of Antarctic Fiction* (<http://www.antarctic-circle.org/fauno.htm>)

- Costello, Peter, *Jules Verne: Inventor of Science-Fiction* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978)
- Crow, Charles L., *American Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009)
- ed. *A Companion to American Gothic* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2014)
- Dake, Charles Romy, *Strange Discovery* (Kila, Massachusetts: Kessinger Publishing Company, 2004)
- Davidson, Edward H., *Poe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957)
- Davis, Wade, *Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory, and the Conquest of Everest* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011)
- Day, David, *Antarctica: A Biography* ((Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
- De Mille, James, *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*. Ed. Daniel Burgoyne (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2011)
- de Vries, David, Gulacy, Paul, and Davis, Dan, *The Thing from Another World: Eternal Vows* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 1993)
- Dostoevsky, Fyodor, *The Brothers Karamazov* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 2009)
- Doyle, Arthur Conan, 'The Captain of the 'Pole-Star'' in Darryl Jones ed. *Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)
- 'The Arctic Seas' in John Lellenberg and Daniel Stashower eds. *"Dangerous Work": Diary of an Arctic Adventure* (London: The British Library, 2012)
- *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Penguin, 20008)
- Eckhardt, Jason C., 'Behind the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraft and the Antarctic in 1930,' *Lovecraft Studies* No. 14 (Spring 1987)
- Eliot, T.S., *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004)
- Evans, Commander Edward, 'Captain Oates: My Recollections of a Gallant Comrade,' *Strand Magazine*, December 1913.

- Fawver, Kurt, ‘“Present”-ly Safe: The Anthropocentrism of Time in H.P. Lovecraft’s Fiction,’ *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (2009)
- Fiennes, Ranulph, *Cold: Extreme Adventures at the Lowest Temperatures on Earth* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2013)
- Foster, Alan Dean, and Lancaster, Bill, *The Thing* (London: Corgi, 1982)
- Francis, Gavin, *Empire Antarctica: Ice, Silence & Emperor Penguins* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2012)
- Gardner, Martin, ed. *The Annotated Ancient Mariner* (London: Anthony Blond, 1965)
- Gould, Stephen Jay, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in the Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987)
- *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History* (New York: W.H. Norton, 1989)
- Griffin, Duane A., ‘Hollow and Habitable Within: Symmes’s Theory of Earth’s Internal Structure and Polar Geography’, *Physical Geography*, 2005, Vol. 25, No. 5
- Groom, Nick, *The Gothic: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
- Hamilton, Sir Richard Vesey, ‘Antarctic Exploration,’ *The Times*, July 25th 1898.
- Harvey, Ronald C., *The Critical History of Edgar Allan Poe’s The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym: “A Dialogue with Unreason”* (New York: Garland, 1998).
- Hayes, Isaac Israel, *The Open Polar Sea: A Narrative of a Voyage of Discovery Towards the North Pole in the Schooner ‘United State’s* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867)
- Hayes, Kevin J., ed. *Edgar Allan Poe in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)

- Healy, Raymond J., and McComas, J. Francis, eds. *Adventures in Time and Space* (New York; Random House, 1946)
- Heller, Terry, *The Delights of Terror: An Aesthetics of the Tale of Terror* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987)
- Higginson, Ian, N., 'The First Antarctic Voyage of Edgar Allan Poe', *Polar Record* 30 (1994)
- Hilton, James, *Lost Horizon* (London: Vintage, 2015)
- Hinton, Charles Howard, *The Fourth Dimension*, (London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1912)
- *A New Era of Thought*, (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co. Ltd., 1888)
- Hodgson, William Hope, *The House on the Borderland* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1908)
- Huet, Marie-Hélène, "Winter Lights: Disaster, Interpretation and Jules Verne's Polar Novels" *Verniana: Jules Verne Studies*, Vol. 2 (2009-2010)
- Hull, Thomas, 'H.P. Lovecraft: A Horror in Higher Dimensions,' *Maths Horizons*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (February 2006)
- Hynes, Samuel, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (London: Vintage, 1991)
- James, Edward, Mendlesohn, Farah, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)
- Jones, Darryl, 'Ultima Thule: *Arthur Gordon Pym*, the Polar Imaginary, and the Hollow Earth,' in *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, Spring 2010, Vol. XI, No. 1.
- *Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016)
- Jones, Max, *The Last Great Quest: Captain Scott's Antarctic Sacrifice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
- Joshi, S.T., *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H.P. Lovecraft in his Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001)

- *The Dreams in the Witch House and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 2005)
- Joshi, S.T., ed. *The Thing on the Doorstep and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 2001)
- Kane, Elisha Kent, *Arctic Explorations: The Second Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin, in the Years 1853- 55* (Philadelphia: Child's and Peterson, 1856)
- Kane, Paul, and O'Regan, Marie, eds. *The Mammoth Book of Body Horror* (London: Robinson, 2012)
- Kemal, Salim, and Gaskell, Ivan, ed. *Landscape, Natural Beauty, and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)
- Klapcsik, Sandor, *Liminality in Fantastic Fiction: A Poststructuralist Approach* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2012)
- Kopley, Richard, ed. *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1992)
- Kristeva, Julia, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)
- Larson, Edward J., *An Empire of Ice: Scott, Shackleton, and the Heroic Age of Antarctic Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011)
- Leane, Elizabeth, *Antarctica in Fiction: Imaginative Narratives of the Far South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)
- 'Locating the Thing: The Antarctic as Alien Space in John W. Campbell's 'Who Goes There?,' ' *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (July 2005)
- Lenz, William E., 'Narratives of Exploration, Sea Fiction, Mariners' Chronicles, and the Rise of American Nationalism: "To Cast Anchor on that Point Where All Meridians Terminate," ' *American Studies*, 1991, Vol. 10, No. 1.

- ‘Poe’s *Arthur Gordon Pym* and the Narrative Technique of the Antarctic Gothic’, *The CEA Critic*, Vol. 53, Issue 3, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991)
- *The Poetics of the Antarctic: A Study in Nineteenth-Century American Cultural Perceptions* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1995)
- Lottman, Herbert R., *Jules Verne: An Exploratory Biography* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1996)
- Lovecraft, H.P., in S.T. Joshi ed. *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories* (London: Penguin, 1999)
- *The Classic Horror Stories* ed. Luckhurst, Roger, ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- *Selected Letters, Vol. I: 1911-24*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1965)
- *Selected Letters, Vol. II: 1925-1929*, ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City Wisconsin: Arkham House Publishers, 1968)
- *Selected Letters, Vol. III: 1929-31* ed. August Derleth and Donald Wandrei (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1971)
- *Selected Letters, Vol. IV: 1932-34*, ed. ed. August Derleth and James Turner (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1976)
- *Selected Letters, Vol. V: 1934-37* ed. August Derleth and James Turner (Sauk City, Wisconsin: Arkham House, 1976)
- *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, ed. E.F. Bleiler (New York: Dover Publications, 1973)
- Luckhurst, Roger, ed. *Late Victorian Gothic Tales* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

- Machen, Arthur, *The Immortal Story of Capt. Scott's Expedition: How Five Brave Englishmen Died* (London: The London Evening News Press, 1913)
- Manhire, Bill, *The Wide White Page: Writers Imagine Antarctica* (Victoria: Victoria University Press, 2004)
- Markham, Clements, 'The Government and Antarctic Exploration,' *The Times*, January 30th, 1898.
- Maury, Matthew Fontaine, *The Physical Geography of the Sea and its Meteorology* ed. John Leighly (New York: Dover Publications, 2003)
- McPhee, John, *Basin and Range* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1981)
- Meakin, David, 'Like Poles Attracting: Intertextual Magnetism in Poe, Verne, and Gracq', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (July 1993)
- Melville, Herman, *Moby-Dick, or, the Whale* (London: Penguin, 2013)
- Mogen, David, Sanders, Scott P., and Karpinski, Joanne B., eds. *Frontier Gothic: Terror and Wonder at the Frontier in American Literature* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Press, 1993)
- Morrison, Toni, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (London: Picador, 1993)
- Murray, Sir John, 'Antarctic Exploration' *The Times*, November 28th 1893.
- Murphy, Gretchen, 'Symzonia, Typee, and the Dream of U.S. Global Isolation', *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance*, 2003, Vol. 49, No. 4.
- Nelson, Victoria, *The Secret Life of Puppets* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001)
- New, W.H., Ed. 'De Mille's Utopian Fantasy,' Special Issue, *Canadian Literature* 145, summer 1995 (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1995)

- Paltock, Robert, *The Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)
- Paver, Michelle, *Dark Matter* (London: Orion, 2010)
- *Thin Air* (London: Orion, 2016)
- Peck, John, *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels 1719-1917* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001)
- Pfarrer, Chuck, Higgins, John, and Starkings, Richard, *The Thing from Another World* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 1993)
- Philbrick, Nathaniel, *Sea of Glory: The Epic South Seas Expedition 1838-42* (London: Harper Prenal, 2005)
- Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day, Volume I: The Gothic Tradition* (London: Longmans, 1996)
- Pyne, Stephen J., *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003)
- Quinn, Patrick F., 'Poe's Imaginary Voyage,' *The Hudson Review* 4 (1952)
- Rank, Otto, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, trans. Harry Tucker (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1971)
- Rawlinson, Mark, "'Waste Dominion,' 'White Warfare,' and Antarctic Modernism,' *Tate Papers*, No. 14, Autumn 2010 (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 2010)
- Raymond, François, ed., *Jules Verne: 5* (Paris: Minard, 1987)
- Reynolds, Jeremiah, *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836)
- 'Information Collected by the Navy Department Relating to Islands, Reefs, Shoals, Etc., in the Pacific Ocean and South Seas, and Showing the Expediency of an Exploring Expedition in that Ocean and those Seas by the Navy' 29 January 1835,

- American State Papers: Naval Affairs* Vol. 4., (Washington: Gale's and Seaton, 1861)
- Reynolds, William, *The Private Journal of William Reynolds United States Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842*, ed. Nathaniel Philbrick and Thomas Philbrick (New York: Penguin, 2004)
- Roberts, Adam, *The History of Science Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)
- *The Thing Itself*, (London: Gollancz, 2015)
- Robinson, Michael F., *The Coldest Crucible: Arctic Exploration and American Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006)
- Rogers, Eugene, 'Richard E. Byrd's First Antarctic Expedition,' *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 110, No. 2 (2002)
- Rose, Leslie, 'Exploring a Secret Land: The Literary and Technological Legacies of Richard E. Byrd,' *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 110, No. 2 (2002)
- Ross, Captain James Clark, *A Voyage of Discovery and Research in the Southern and Antarctic Regions During the Years 1839-43* (London: John Murray, 1847)
- Rubin, Jeff, *Antarctica: Lonely Planet Guide* (London: Lonely Planet Books, 2005)
- Saunders, Harold E., 'The Flight of Admiral Byrd to the South Pole and the Exploration of Marie Byrd Land,' *The Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 82, No. 5, (June 1940)
- Schultz, David E., and Joshi, S.T., ed. *An Epicure of the Terrible: A Centennial Anthology of Essays in Honour of H.P. Lovecraft* (Cranbury New Jersey: Associated University Press: 1991)
- Scott, Robert Falcon, 'To the South Pole: Captain Scott's Own Story, Told from His Journals,' *The Strand*, June-September 1913

- *The Voyage of the Discovery* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2009)
- Scott, Robert Falcon, Jones, Max, eds. *Journals: Captain Scott's Last Expedition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Seaborn, Captain Adam (Pseud.), *Symzonia: Voyage of Discovery* (New York: J. Seymour, 1820), [Online] Retrieved from <http://www.sacred-texts.com/earth/sym/sym00.htm>
- Shackleton, Ernest, *The Heart of the Antarctic: The Farthest South Expedition 1907-1909 and South: The Endurance Expedition*, ed. by Beau Riffenburgh (London: Wordsworth Editions, 2007)
- Simmons, David, ed. *New Critical Essays on H.P. Lovecraft* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)
- Simpson-Housley, Paul, *Antarctica: Exploration, Perception, and Metaphor* (London: Routledge, 1992)
- Skinner, Luke, 'Facing Future Climate Change,' *Philosophical Transactions: Mathematical, Physical and Engineering Sciences*, Vol. 366, No. 1885, (London: Royal Society, 2008)
- Smith, Andrew, and Hughes, William, eds. *EcoGothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Smith, Edmund, ed. *Jules Verne: Narratives of Modernity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000)
- Smith, Philip, and Johnson, Rodney W., 'From the South Pole to the Moon,' *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 24, No. 10 (Chicago: Educational Foundation for Nuclear Science, 1965)
- Spengemann, William C., *The Adventurous Muse: Poetics of American, 1789-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977)
- Spengler, Oswald, *The Decline of the West*, Edited by Arthur Helps and Translated by Charles Francis Atkinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)
- The Sphere*, May 1913

- Spufford, Francis, *I May Be Some Time: Ice and the English Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997)
- ed. *To the Ends of the Earth: An Anthology of the Finest Writing on the Arctic and Antarctic Vol. 2: The Antarctic* (London: Granta Books, 2007)
- Standish, David, *Hollow Earth: The Long and Curious History of Imagining Strange Lands, Fantastical Creatures, Advanced Civilizations, and Marvellous Machines below the Earth's Surface* (Massachusetts: De Capo Press, 2006)
- Stovall, Floyd, 'Poe's Debt to Coleridge', *Studies in English*, July 1930, No. 10.
- Stover, Leon, *Science Fiction from Wells to Heinlein* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 2002)
- Symmes, John Cleve, *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* (1820) <http://www.sacred-texts.com/earth/sym/>
- Tally Jr., Robert T., *Poe and the Subversion of American Literature: Satire, Fantasy, Critique* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014)
- Tanner, Tony, ed. *The Oxford Book of Sea Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)
- Taves, Brian, ed. *An Antarctic Mystery, or, The Sphinx of the Ice Fields* by Jules Verne (Milton Keynes: Wildside Press, 2005)
- Thacker, Eugene, *In the Dust of This Planet: Horror of Philosophy Vol.1* (Alesford: Zero Books, 2011)
- The Thing* (1982), directed by John Carpenter, produced by David Foster, Lawrence Turman, and Stuart Cohen, and screenplay by Bill Lancaster.
- The Thing from Another World* (1951), directed by Christian Nyby, produced by Howard Hawks, and screenplay by Charles Lederer
- Thoreau, Henry David, *Walden; or Life in the Woods* (London: Penguin, 1983)
- Thubron, Colin, *To a Mountain in Tibet* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2011)

- Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Fantastic: a structural approach to a literary genre* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975)
- Trigg, Dylan, *The Thing: A Phenomenology of Horror* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2014)
- Tuan, Yi-Fu, *Landscapes of Fear* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979)
- *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001)
- ‘Desert and Ice: Ambivalent Aesthetics’ in Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell ed., *Landscape, Natural Beauty and the Arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- Unwin, Timothy, *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005)
- Verne, Jules, *An Antarctic Mystery, or, The Sphinx of the Ice-Fields* (London: Wildside Press, 2007)
- *The Mysterious Island*, (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2002)
- Waisbard, Simone, and Eydoux, Henri-Paul Eydoux, eds. *The World's Last Mysteries* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977)
- Walden, Daniel, ‘The Coastal Frontier and the Oceanic Wilderness in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*’ (Baltimore: The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, 2011)
- Walker, I.M., *Edgar Allan Poe: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986)
- Weddell, Captain James, *A Voyage towards the South Pole* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825)
- Wells, H.G., *An Experiment in Autobiography Vol. 1* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984)

- ‘The Remarkable Case of Davidson’s Eyes’, *The Stolen Bacillus and Other Incidents*,
(London: Methuen & Co., 1895)
- *The Wife of Sir Isaac Harman* (London: Macmillan, 1914)
- Wheatley, Dennis, *The Man Who Missed the War* (London: Arrow, 1970)
- Wheeler, Sara, *Terra Incognita: Travels in Antarctica* (London: Vintage, 1997)
- White, Tony, *Shackleton's Man Goes South*, (London: The Science Museum, 2013)
- Wicher, Andzej, Spyra, Piotr, and Matyjaszczyk, Joanna, ed. *Basic Categories of Fantastic Literature Revisited* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014)
- Wijkmark, Johan, “‘One of the Most Intensely Exciting Secrets’: The Antarctic in American Literature, 1820-1849’ (Unpublished PhD thesis, Karlstad University Studies, 2009)
- Wilde, Oscar, *The Canterville Ghost* (London: John W. Luce and Company, 1906)
- Williams, Glyndwr, *Arctic Labyrinth: The Quest for the Northwest Passage* (London: Penguin Allen Lane, 2009)
- Wilson, Eric G., *The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science and the Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)
- Woodburn, Susan, ‘Bartholomew and the Naming of Antarctica’ in *CAIRT: Newsletter of the Scottish Maps Forum*, Issue 13 (July 2008)
- Zanger, Jules, ‘Poe’s Endless Voyage: *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*’ *Papers on Language and Literature* 22 (1986)