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Response to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*

This response is a series of disparate observations more than a cohesive essay on a single topic.

The journey to the Antarctic is, unlike all of the journeys encountered thus far, not its original intention, but a series of chance circumstances, such as the sudden decision to avoid the Strait of Magellan. In the previous readings, whether the journeyer was in search of whales, reaching the pole, finding a NWP, or seeking forensic evidence of the ones who sought the NWP, the original goal was explicit and pole-related, and the ulterior motive of reaching the pole was not an unthinkable side-effect. However, simply by chance, there is the drifting southward on their first voyage, “from north to south, *not less than five-and-twenty* [120] *degrees!*” (Poe 90) – completely unmanned for the majority of their voyage. They then join a ship which happens to be traveling around the southern tip of Africa, and then towards the southern pole due to a shift in intentions. In the final few chapters, the last leg of the journey at the lowest latitudes is a life-or-death race effected by the native people.

This reminds me of various accounts from the scientists in Herzog’s *Encounters at the End of of the World*, who mention that Antarctica is a place where eccentric people converge. I paraphrase here, due to not revisiting the transcript of the movie: they describe a convergence of people who want to jump off the margin of the map, and people who are not tied down, and thus fall down to the bottom of the Earth. Is Poe trying to imply something similar – that we are naturally drawn (if we survive a series of miracles) to the pole(s)? That what seems to be repeated misfortune is really more intentional, or at least less than random chance?

Poe's lack of emphasis on snow and the coldness of the Antarctic is notable. This may simply be an overlooked inaccuracy, but it feels out of place when Poe goes into so much detail about other scientific accuracies (e.g., the Galapagos tortoises, the filling of ships with grain, the biche de mer). Even if the Antarctic is visited during the summer (February), it may still be below freezing temperatures, far too cold for people not originally equipped to visit the poles. Moreover, while the closing Note chapter suggests that the cries of "Tekeli-li!" by the Tsalalians is made in response to whiteness, it is unclear how they are not continually averse to the whiteness of the snow that perpetually surrounds them.

I also wonder about the influence of other literature on *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, and its on other literature. The first half of the book, which is a tale of unlikely survival on a shipwreck, is highly reminiscent of the 2001 novel *The Life of Pi*, containing similar themes such as cannibalism, drinking turtle blood, false illusion, and delirium. We have already learned that Symmes is a contemporary of Poe, and the dramatic conclusion of the book is highly influenced by the speculation of some dramatic disruption of the pattern of increasing cold in the more extreme latitudes. When reading the final few pages, the description put the image of the end of the world somehow reminded me of the misty opening to the "Hidden World" in *How to Train Your Dragon 3*, which may very well be a Symmesianism reference. In the image of that entrance (shown below), we have many of the same visual elements: the mist that obscures the mysterious bottom, the cataract opening into a chasm in the middle of a warm ocean, the darkness of the ocean and rocks as compared to the white mist.



The entrance to the Hidden World from *How to Train Your Dragon 3*. Image courtesy of https://howtotrainyourdragon.fandom.com/wiki/Hidden_World.

Also: a general commentary on the book (not pole-related)

I think the book is much less convincing by the fact that there is a Preface and ending Notes chapter that attest to the veracity of the events in the book, and by the awfully convenient rescues of the narrator (and of his similarly-fortunate crewmate Peters). The other aspect that confuses me is the bifurcation of the story into two misfortune-bound ship voyages: the first by the *Grampus*, and the second by the *Jane*. It is only really the latter voyage that concerns the Antarctic and thus this course; the first half of the book seems to be entirely disjoint and provides little to the latter half.