

= The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket =

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket (1838) is the only complete novel written by American writer Edgar Allan Poe . The work relates the tale of the young Arthur Gordon Pym , who stows away aboard a whaling ship called the Grampus . Various adventures and misadventures befall Pym , including shipwreck , mutiny , and cannibalism , before he is saved by the crew of the Jane Guy . Aboard this vessel , Pym and a sailor named Dirk Peters continue their adventures further south . Docking on land , they encounter hostile black @-@ skinned natives before escaping back to the ocean . The novel ends abruptly as Pym and Peters continue toward the South Pole .

The story starts out as a fairly conventional adventure at sea , but it becomes increasingly strange and hard to classify . Poe , who intended to present a realistic story , was inspired by several real @-@ life accounts of sea voyages , and drew heavily from Jeremiah N. Reynolds and referenced the Hollow Earth theory . He also drew from his own experiences at sea . Analyses of the novel often focus on the potential autobiographical elements as well as hints of racism and the symbolism in the final lines of the work .

Difficulty in finding literary success early in his short story @-@ writing career inspired Poe to pursue writing a longer work . A few serialized installments of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket were first published in the Southern Literary Messenger , though never completed . The full novel was published in July 1838 in two volumes . Some critics responded negatively to the work for being too gruesome and for cribbing heavily from other works , while others praised its exciting adventures . Poe himself later called it " a very silly book " . Nevertheless , The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket became an influential work , notably for Herman Melville and Jules Verne .

= = Plot summary = =

The book comprises a preface , 25 chapters , and an afterword , with a total of around 72 @,@ 000 words .

= = On board the Ariel (Chapter I) = =

Arthur Gordon Pym was born on the island of Nantucket , famous for its fishing harbor and whaling . His best friend , Augustus Barnard , is the son of the captain of a whaling ship . One night , the two boys become drunk and decide , on Augustus 's whim , to take advantage of the breeze and sail out on Pym 's sailboat , the Ariel . The breeze , however , turns out to be the beginnings of a violent storm . The situation gets critical when Augustus passes out drunk , and the inexperienced Pym must take control of the dinghy . The Ariel is overtaken by the Penguin , a returning whaling ship . Against the captain 's wishes , the crew of the Penguin turns back to search for and rescue both Augustus and Pym . After they are safely back on land , they decide to keep this episode a secret from their parents .

= = On board the Grampus (Chapters II ? XIII) = =

His first ocean misadventure does not dissuade Pym from sailing again ; rather , his imagination is ignited by the experience . His interest is further fueled by the tales of a sailor 's life that Augustus tells him . Pym decides to follow Augustus as a stowaway aboard the Grampus , a whaling vessel commanded by Augustus 's father that is bound for the southern seas . Augustus helps Pym by preparing a hideout in the hold for him and smuggling Tiger , Pym 's faithful dog , on board . Augustus promises to provide Pym with water and food until the ship is too far from shore to return , at which time Pym wants to reveal himself .

Due to the stuffy atmosphere and vapors in the dark and cramped hold , Pym becomes increasingly comatose and delirious over the days . He can 't communicate with Augustus , and the promised supplies fail to arrive , so Pym runs out of water . In the course of his ordeal , he discovers a letter

written in blood attached to his dog Tiger , warning Pym to remain hidden , as his life depends on it .

Augustus finally sets Pym free , explaining the mysterious message , as well as his delay in retrieving his friend : a mutiny had erupted on the whaling ship . Part of the crew was slaughtered by the mutineers , while another group , including Augustus 's father , were set adrift in a small boat . Augustus survived because he had befriended one of the mutineers , Dirk Peters , who now regrets his part in the uprising .

Peters , Pym , and Augustus hatch a plan to seize control of the ship : Pym , whose presence is unknown to the mutineers , will wait for a storm and then dress in the clothes of a recently dead sailor , masquerading as a ghost . In the confusion sure to break out among the superstitious sailors , Peters and Augustus , helped by Tiger , will take over the ship again . Everything goes according to plan , and soon the three men are masters of the Grampus : all the mutineers are killed or thrown overboard except one , Richard Parker , whom they spare to help them run the vessel .

The storm increases in force , breaking the mast , tearing the sails and flooding the hold . All four manage to survive by lashing themselves to the hull . As the storm abates , they find themselves safe for the moment , but without provisions . Over the following days , the men face death by starvation and thirst .

They sight an erratically moving Dutch ship with a grinning red @-@ capped seaman on deck , nodding in apparent greeting as they approach . Initially delighted with the prospect of deliverance , they quickly become horrified as they are overcome with an awful stench . They soon realize that the apparently cheerful sailor is , in fact , a corpse propped up in the ship 's rigging , his " grin " a result of his partially decomposed skull moving as a seagull feeds upon it . As the ship passes , it becomes clear that all its occupants are rotting corpses .

As time passes , with no sign of land or other ships , Parker suggests that one of them should be killed as food for the others . They draw straws , following the Custom of the Sea and Parker is sacrificed . This gives the others a reprieve , but Augustus soon dies from wounds received when they reclaimed the Grampus , and several more storms batter the already badly damaged ship . Pym and Peters float on the upturned hull and are close to death when they are rescued by the Jane Guy , a ship out of Liverpool .

= = = On board the Jane Guy (Chapters XIV ? XX) = = =

On the Jane Guy , Pym and Peters become part of the crew and join the ship on its expedition to hunt sea calves and seals for fur , and to explore the southern oceans . Pym studies the islands around the Cape of Good Hope , becoming interested in the social structures of penguins , albatrosses , and other sea birds . Upon his urging , the captain agrees to sail further south towards the unexplored Antarctic regions .

The ship crosses an ice barrier and arrives in open sea , close to the South Pole , albeit with a mild climate . Here the Jane Guy comes upon a mysterious island called Tsalal , inhabited by a tribe of black , apparently friendly natives led by a chief named Too @-@ Wit . The color white is alien to the island 's inhabitants and unnerves them , because nothing that color exists there . Even the natives ' teeth are black . The island is also home to many undiscovered species of flora and fauna . Even its water is different from water elsewhere , being strangely thick and exhibiting multicolored veins .

The natives ' relationship with the sailors is initially cordial , so Too @-@ Wit and the captain begin trading . Their friendliness , however , turns out to be a ruse and on the eve of the ship 's proposed departure , the natives ambush the crew in a narrow gorge . Everyone except Pym and Peters is slaughtered , and the Jane Guy is overrun and burned by the malevolent tribe .

= = = Tsalal and further south (Chapters XXI ? XXV) = = =

Pym and Peters hide in the mountains surrounding the site of the ambush . They discover a labyrinth of passages in the hills with strange marks on the walls , and disagree about whether these

are the result of artificial or natural causes . Facing a shortage of food , they make a desperate run and steal a pirogue from the natives , narrowly escaping from the island and taking one of its inhabitants prisoner .

The small boat drifts further south on a current of increasingly warm water , which has become milky white in color . After several days they encounter a rain of ashes and then observe a huge cataract of fog or mist , which splits open to accommodate their entrance upon approach . The native dies as a huge shrouded white figure appears before them .

Here the novel ends abruptly . A short post @-@ script , ostensibly written by the book 's editors , compares the shapes of the labyrinth and the wall marks noted by Pym to Arabian and Egyptian letters and hieroglyphs with meanings of " Shaded " , " White " , and " Region to the South " .

= = Analysis = =

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket has defied a universally accepted interpretation . Scholar Scott Peeples wrote that it is " at once a mock nonfictional exploration narrative , adventure saga , bildungsroman , hoax , largely plagiarized travelogue , and spiritual allegory " and " one of the most elusive major texts of American literature . " Biographer James M. Hutchisson writes that the plot both " soars to new heights of fictional ingenuity and descends to new lows of silliness and absurdity " .

One reason for the confusion comes from many continuity errors throughout the novel . For example , Pym notes that breaking a bottle while trapped in the hold saved his life because the sound alerted Augustus to his presence while searching . However , Pym notes that Augustus did not tell him this until " many years elapsed " , even though Augustus is dead eight chapters later . Nevertheless , much of the novel is carefully plotted . Novelist John Barth notes , for example , that the midway point of the novel occurs when Pym reaches the equator , the midway point of the globe .

Scholar Shawn Rosenheim believes that the use of hieroglyphs in the novel served as a precursor to Poe 's interest in cryptography . The pictographs themselves were likely inspired by The Kentuckies in New @-@ York (1834) by William Alexander Caruthers , where similar writing is the work of a black slave . Unlike the previous sea @-@ voyage tales that Poe had written , such as " MS. Found in a Bottle " , Pym is undertaking this trip on purpose . It has been suggested that the journey is about establishing a national American identity as well as discovering a personal identity .

Poe also presents the effects of alcohol in the novel . The opening episode , for example , shows that intoxicated people can sometimes seem entirely sober and then , suddenly , the effects of alcohol show through . Such a depiction is a small version of a larger focus in the novel on contradictions between chaos and order . Even nature seems unnatural . Water , for example , is very different at the end of the novel , appearing either colorful or " unnaturally clear . " The sun by the end shines " with a sickly yellow lustre emitting no decisive light " before seemingly being extinguished .

= = = Autobiographical elements = = =

Elements of the novel are often read as autobiographical . The novel begins with Arthur Gordon Pym , a name similar to Edgar Allan Poe , departing from Edgartown , Massachusetts on Martha 's Vineyard . Interpreted this way , the protagonist is actually sailing away from himself , or his ego . The middle name of " Gordon " , in replacing Poe 's connection to the Allan family , was turned into a reference to George Gordon Byron , a poet whom Poe deeply admired . The scene where Pym disguises himself from his grandfather while noting that he intends to inherit wealth from him also indicates a desire for Poe to free himself from family obligation and , specifically , scorning the patrimony of his foster @-@ father John Allan .

Dates are also relevant to this autobiographical reading . According to the text , Pym arrives at the island of Tsalal on January 19 ? Poe 's birthday . Scholars , including Burton R. Pollin and Richard Wilbur , suggest that the character of Augustus was based on Poe 's childhood friend Ebenezer

Burling or on Poe 's brother William Henry Leonard Poe , who served in South America and elsewhere as a sailor aboard the USS Macedonian . In the novel , the date of Augustus 's death corresponds to that of the death of Poe 's brother . The first chapter features Pym 's sloop named the Ariel , the name of a character once played by Poe 's mother Eliza Poe , and also the name of Percy Bysshe Shelley 's boat , on which he died , originally named Don Juan in honor of Lord Byron .

= = = Race = = =

One thread of critical analysis of this tale focuses on the possibly racist implications of Poe 's plot and imagery . One such plot element is the black cook who leads the mutiny on the Grampus and is its most bloodthirsty participant . Dirk Peters , a hybrid of white and Native American ancestry , is described as having a ferocious appearance , with long , protruding teeth , bowed legs , and a bald head like " the head of most negroes . " The brilliant whiteness of the final figure in the novel contrasts with the dark @-@ skinned savages and such a contrast may call to mind the escalating racial tensions over the question of slavery in the United States as Poe was writing the novel .

Additionally , the novel drew from prevalent assumptions during the time that dark @-@ skinned people were somehow inherently inferior . One critic of the use of race in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* is Toni Morrison . In " *Playing in the Dark : Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* , " Morrison discusses how the Africanist presence in the novel is used as an " Other " against which the author defines " white , " " free , " and " individual " . In her explorations of the depiction of African characters in white American literature , Morrison writes that " no early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism than Poe " because of the focus on the symbolism of black and white in Poe 's novel . This possible racial symbolism is explored further in Mat Johnson 's satirical fantasy *Pym* (2011) .

= = = Ending = = =

The novel ends abruptly with the sudden appearance of a bizarre enshrouded figure having skin hues " of the perfect whiteness of the snow . " Many readers were left unsatisfied by this ending because , as Poe relative and scholar Harry Lee Poe wrote , " it didn 't match the kind of clear ending they expected from a novel . " Poe may have purposely left the ending subject to speculation . Some scholars have suggested that the ending serves as a symbolic conclusion to Pym 's spiritual journey and others suggest that Pym has actually died in this scene , as though his tale is somehow being told posthumously . Alternatively , Pym may die in the retelling of the story at precisely the same point he should have died during the actual adventure . Like other characters in works by Poe , Pym seems to submit willingly to this fate , whatever it is . Kenneth Silverman notes that the figure radiates ambivalence and it is not clear if it is a symbol of destruction or of protection .

The chasms that open throughout the sea in the final moments of the book derive from the Hollow Earth theory . The area closest to the Pole is also , surprisingly , warm rather than cold , as Symmes believed . Symmes also believed there were civilizations inside this Hollow Earth and the enshrouded figure who appears at the end may indicate one such civilization near the Pole .

= = Composition and publication history = =

Poe had intended to collect a number of his early short stories into a volume titled *Tales of the Folio Club* in the 1830s . The collection would be unified as a series of tales presented by members of a literary club designed as burlesques of contemporary literary criticism . Poe had previously printed several of these stories in the *Philadelphia Saturday Courier* and the *Baltimore Saturday Visitor* .

An editor , James Kirke Paulding , tried to assist him in publishing this collection . However , Paulding reported back to Poe that the publishers at Harper & Brothers declined the collection , saying that readers were looking for simple , long works like novels . They suggested , " if he will lower himself a little to the ordinary comprehension of the generality of readers , and prepare ... a

single work ... they will make such arrangements with him as will be liberal and satisfactory . " They suggested " if other engagements permit ... undertake a Tale in a couple volumes , for that is the magical number . " The response from Harper & Brothers inspired Poe to begin a long work and began writing The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket . Poe arranged with his boss at the Southern Literary Messenger to publish his novel in several serialized installments at a pay rate of \$ 3 per page .

However , Poe retired from his role at the Messenger on January 3 , 1837 , as the installments were being published ; some scholars suggest he was fired and this led him to abandoning the novel . His split with the Messenger began a " blank period " where he did not publish much and suffered from unemployment , poverty , and no success in his literary pursuits . Poe soon realized writing a book @-@ length narrative was a necessary career decision , partly because he had no steady job and the economy was suffering from the Panic of 1837 . He also set part of the story as a quest to Antarctica to capitalize the public 's sudden interest in that topic .

After his marriage to Virginia Clemm , Poe spent the following winter and spring completing his manuscript for this novel in New York . He earned a small amount of money by taking in a boarder named William Gowans . During his fifteen months in New York , amidst the harsh economic climate , Poe published only two tales , " Von Jung , the Mystific " and " Siope . A Fable " . Harper & Brothers announced Poe 's novel would be published in May 1837 , but the Panic forced them to delay .

The novel was finally published in book form under the title The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket in July 1838 , although it did not include Poe 's name and was instead presented as an account by Pym himself . Poe excused the earlier serialized version by noting that the Messenger had mistakenly adapted it " under the garb of fiction " . As Harper & Brothers recommended , it was printed in two volumes . Its full subtitle was :

Comprising the Details of Mutiny and Atrocious Butchery on Board the American Brig Grampus , on Her Way to the South Seas , in the Month of June , 1827 . With an Account of the Recapture of the Vessel by the Survivors ; Their Shipwreck and Subsequent Horrible Sufferings from Famine ; Their Deliverance by Means of the British Schooner Jane Guy ; the Brief Cruise of this Latter Vessel in the Atlantic Ocean ; Her Capture , and the Massacre of Her Crew Among a Group of Islands in the Eighty @-@ Fourth Parallel of Southern Latitude ; Together with the Incredible Adventures and Discoveries Still Farther South to Which That Distressing Calamity Gave Rise .

The first overseas publication of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket appeared only a few months later when it was printed in London without Poe 's permission , although the final paragraph was omitted . This early publication of the novel initiated British interest in Poe .

= = Literary significance and reception = =

Contemporary reviews for The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket were generally unfavorable . Fifteen months after its publication , it was reviewed by Lewis Gaylord Clark , a fellow author who carried on a substantial feud with Poe . His review printed in The Knickerbocker said the book was " told in a loose and slip @-@ shod style , seldom chequered by any of the more common graces of composition . " Clark went on , " This work is one of much interest , with all its defects , not the least of which is that it is too liberally stuffed with ' horrid circumstances of blood and battle . ' "

Many reviewers commented on the excess of violent scenes . In addition to noting the novel 's gruesome details , a review in Burton 's Gentleman 's Magazine (possibly William Evans Burton himself) criticized its borrowed descriptions of geography and errors in nautical information . The reviewer considered it a literary hoax and called it an " impudent attempt at humbugging the public " and regretted " Mr. Poe 's name in connexion with such a mass of ignorance and effrontery " . Poe later wrote to Burton that he agreed with the review , saying it " was essentially correct " and the novel was " a very silly book " .

Other reviews condemned the attempt at presenting a true story . A reviewer for the Metropolitan Magazine noted that , though the story was good as fiction , " when palmed upon the public as a true thing , it cannot appear in any other light than that of a bungling business ? an impudent

attempt at imposing on the credulity of the ignorant . " Nevertheless , some readers believed portions of Poe 's novel were true , especially in England , and justified the absurdity of the book with an assumption that author Pym was exaggerating the truth . Publisher George Putnam later noted that " whole columns of these new ' discoveries , ' including the hieroglyphics (sic) found on the rocks , were copied by many of the English country papers as sober historical truth . "

In contrast , the renowned 20th century Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges , who admitted Poe as a strong influence , praised the novel as " Poe 's greatest work " . H. G. Wells noted that " Pym tells what a very intelligent mind could imagine about the south polar region a century ago " . Even so , most scholars did not engage in much serious discussion or analysis of the novel until the 1950s , though many in France recognized the work much earlier .

The financial and critical failure of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* was a turning point in Poe 's career . For one , he was driven to literary duties that would make him money , notably his controversial role as editor of *The Conchologist 's First Book* in April 1839 . He also wrote a short series called " Literary Small Talk " for a new Baltimore @-@ based magazine called *American Museum of Science , Literature and the Arts* .

In need of work , Poe accepted a job at the low salary of \$ 10 per week as assistant editor for Burton 's *Gentleman 's Magazine* , despite their negative review of his novel . He also returned to his focus on short stories rather than longer works of prose ; Poe 's next published book after this , his only completed novel , was the collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* in 1840 .

= = Influence and legacy = =

= = = 19th century = = =

Scholars , including Patrick F. Quinn and John J. McAleer , have noted parallels between Herman Melville 's *Moby @-@ Dick* and *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* and other Poe works . Quinn noted that there were enough similarities that Melville must have studied Poe 's novel and , if not , it would be " one of the most extraordinary accidents in literature " . McAleer noted that Poe 's short story " *The Fall of the House of Usher* " inspired " Ahab 's flawed character " in *Moby @-@ Dick* . Scholar Jack Scherting also noted similarities between *Moby @-@ Dick* and Poe 's " *MS. Found in a Bottle* " .

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket became one of Poe 's most @-@ translated works ; by 1978 , scholars had counted over 300 editions , adaptations , and translations . This novel has proven to be particularly influential in France . French poet and author Charles Baudelaire translated the novel in 1857 as *Les Aventures d 'Arthur Gordon Pym* . Baudelaire was also inspired by Poe 's novel in his own poetry . " *Voyage to Cythera* " rewrites part of Poe 's scene where birds eat human flesh .

French author Jules Verne greatly admired Poe and wrote a study , *Edgar Poe et ses ?uvres* , in 1864 . Poe 's story " *Three Sundays in a Week* " may have inspired Verne 's novel *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873) . In 1897 , Verne published a sequel to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* called *An Antarctic Mystery* . Like Poe 's novel , Verne attempted to present an imaginative work of fiction as a believable story by including accurate factual details . The two @-@ volume novel explores the adventures of the *Halbrane* as its crew searches for answers to what became of Pym . Translations of this text are sometimes titled *The Sphinx of Ice* or *The Mystery of Arthur Gordon Pym* .

An informal sequel to *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* is the 1899 novel *A Strange Discovery* by Charles Romeyn Dake where the narrator , Doctor Bainbridge , recounts the story his patient Dirk Peters told him of his journey with Gordon Pym in Antarctica , including a discussion of Poe 's poem " *The Raven* " .

= = = 20th century = = =

Prince Amerigo in Henry James 's novel *The Golden Bowl* (1904) remembered *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* : " He remembered to have read as a boy a wonderful tale by Allan Poe ... which was a thing to show , by the way , what imagination Americans could have : the story of the shipwrecked Gordon Pym , who ... found ... a thickness of white air ... of the color of milk or of snow . "

Poe 's novel was also an influence on H. P. Lovecraft , whose 1936 novel *At the Mountains of Madness* follows similar thematic direction and borrows the cry *tekeli @-@* li from the novel . Chaosium 's role @-@ playing adventure *Beyond the Mountains of Madness* (1999) , a sequel to Lovecraft 's novel , includes a " missing ending " of Poe 's novel , in which Pym encounters some of Lovecraft 's creatures at their Antarctic city .

Rene Magritte 's 1937 painting *Not to be Reproduced* depicts a copy of Poe 's book in the lower right of the work .

Another French sequel was *La Conquête de l 'Eternel* (1947) by Dominique André .

Georges Perec 's 1969 novel *A Void* , notable for not containing a single letter e , contains an e @-@ less rewriting of Poe 's " *The Raven* " that is attributed to Arthur Gordon Pym in order to avoid using the two es found in Poe 's name .

On May 5 , 1974 author and journalist Arthur Koestler published a letter from reader Nigel Parker in *The Sunday Times* of a striking coincidence between a scene in Poe 's novel and an actual event that happened decades later : In 1884 , the yacht *Mignonette* sank , with four men cast adrift . They drew lots to decide which of them should be sacrificed as food for the other three , just as in Poe 's novel . The loser was a sailor named Richard Parker , coincidentally the same name as Poe 's fictional character . Parker 's shipmates , Tom Dudley and Edwin Stephens , were later tried for murder in a precedent @-@ setting common law trial , the renowned *R v Dudley and Stephens* .

In Paul Theroux 's travelogue *The Old Patagonian Express* (1979) , Theroux reads parts of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* to Jorge Luis Borges . Theroux describes it in this book as being the " most terrifying " story he had ever read .

In Paul Auster 's *City of Glass* (1985) , the lead character Quinn has a revelation that makes him think of the discovery of the strange hieroglyphs at the end of Poe 's novel .

In a 1988 *Young All @-@ Stars* comic book written by Roy and Dann Thomas , Arthur Gordon Pym is a 19th @-@ century explorer who discovered the lost Arctic civilization of the alien Dyzan . Pym goes on to become Jules Verne 's Captain Nemo , eventually sinking the RMS *Titanic* . This story also uses elements of Edward Bulwer @-@ Lytton 's 1871 novel *Vril* .

= = = 21st century = = =

Yann Martel named a character in his Man Booker Prize @-@ winning novel *Life of Pi* (2001) after Poe 's fictional character , Richard Parker . Mat Johnson 's 2011 novel *Pym* is a satirical fantasy exploring racial politics in the United States , drawing its inspiration from *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* , as well as being modeled very closely on the original .

Funeral Doom band Ahab based their 2012 album *The Giant* on *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* .