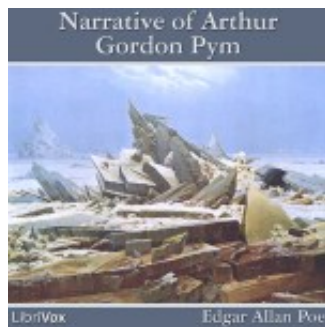


The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket by Edgar Allan Poe

by Rev. Joe Dirt - Tuesday, October 21, 2014

<http://www.curmudgeon-alley.com/the-narrative-of-arthur-gordon-pym-of-nantucket-by-edgar-allan-poe/>



[Edgar Allan Poe](#) is best known for his short stories and poetry, particularly the poem [The Raven](#). In researching Poe I discovered that he is known as the founder of the detective fiction genre and credited with reinventing science fiction. During his lifetime he was best known as a literary critic. In reading the Wikipedia article I had another myth burst. I was always under the impression that Poe was a drug addict and died from such a life style. Poe had his issues, alcoholism may have been one of them, but many of the negative qualities associated with Poe are the result of a smear campaign by an enemy of his, [Rufus Wilmot Griswold](#) and a public all too willing to be titillated. However, Poe did die in mysterious circumstances and his death has been attributed to a cornucopia of etiologies.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket is Poe's only novel, although not a long one. It is a book in 3 distinct parts.

The first part is the classic sea adventure story. A young man is desirous of going to sea for the adventures he believes he will encounter. His parents and grandfather are adamantly opposed to his plan. Of course, he is stowed away on the whaler by his friend, the son of the captain. A few days out to sea there is a mutiny and most of the crew are murdered or set adrift, the exception being his friend. There is a retaking of the ship. There is a storm that nearly destroys the ship leaving it adrift with our protagonist, his friend and two of the mutineers. Days and days without food or water result in cannibalism. One of the mutineers dies as does his friend. The two remaining are eventually rescued by a passing ship.

This is where the second part more or less starts. This part is essentially a geography and history lesson of the South Pacific and the Antarctic. Whether it is accurate or imagined I will leave to someone else to research. This part acts as a bridge between the sea adventure and the third part.

The third part I would put in the realm of science fiction. At the time that Poe wrote this the Antarctic was basically an unexplored region and thus open to all sorts of conjectures. What Poe imagined was a tropical region guarded by ice. While not specifically stated the impression was given that this was possible due to volcanic activity at the South Pole whose influence decreased the further north you went. It is populated by a barbarous tribe people possibly of Ethiopian extraction!

Finally, the novel abruptly ends with the explanation given that the narrator had died before completing the work and the last few chapters of his notes could not be found. To me this was a less than satisfying conclusion to the work. Apparently [Jules Verne](#) felt so also and wrote a sequel to it, [An Antarctic Mystery, or Sphinx of the Ice Fields](#).

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