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## ANTARCTIC UTOPIAS

### Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* and the Exploration of the South Pole

Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?  
Au fond de l'inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau!*

Baudelaire «Le voyage»

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is a tale of adventure, exploration and discovery describing an imaginary voyage to the South Pole. The title suggests that Poe is placing his work within a narrative tradition which associates the act of discovery, the penetration of the *terra incognita*, with an act of inscription into historical memory. When a new land is discovered it immediately enters the written memory of the West not only through mapping but also through the accounts and narratives of its exploration. Poe's *Narrative* is concerned with such an inscription, both literal (exploring a land) and literary (exploring a genre). In search of an Antarctic imbued with psychological and political significance, Poe's explorer attempts to find and chart the boundaries between opposites, between known and unknown, fact and fiction, white and black.

The tale of discovery dominates the second half of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, when Pym and Peteres, after the cannibalization of Parker and the death of Augustus, are recovered from the drifting *Grampus* by the schooner *Jane Guy*. Characteristically, Arthur Gordon Pym, a hero with a name recalling the author's, begins his voyage towards the South Pole after the death of his friend Augustus, who represented the conscious, rational, active and ordered mind. His new companion, and his dark double, is Dirk Peters, who is half-white and half American Indian<sup>1</sup>.

In chapter 16 the discourse changes, the romantic adventure suddenly assuming a scientific guise, as Pym incorporates observations of previous

1. Peters' mixed parentage and racial ambiguity are significant in a narrative concerned with absolute whiteness and blackness. Peters is described in chapter 4 as «the son of an Indian squaw» from the Black Hills near the source of the Missouri and of a fur trader, «ferocious-looking» and misshapen, «short in stature... but his limbs of a Herculean mold». Peters' head is «equally deformed, being of immense size, with an indentation on the crown (like that on the head of most Negroes), and entirely bald».



Antarctic explorers in his account of the voyage. The narrator has already located the islands encountered by the *Jane Guy*, giving the latitude and longitude of each island and the history of its discovery. When Captain Guy decides to sail southward «with the resolution of penetrating in that course as far as possible» (158; ch. 16), Pym announces that he will offer a brief account of the previous exploration of the South Pole:

Before entering upon this portion of my narrative, it may be as well, for the information of those readers who have paid little attention to the progress of discovery in these regions, to give some brief account of the very few attempts at reaching the Southern Pole which have hitherto been made. (158; ch. 16)

The narrator wishes to include his tale within the narrative tradition of travel exploration. By summarizing the previous efforts of Antarctic exploration and by quoting from the various existing narratives, Pym asserts the account's ability to inscribe a new discovery in the narrative of history.

Rather than simply using the tradition of the popular early nineteenth-century travel account as a vehicle for satire and hoax<sup>2</sup>, Poe examines the significance of exploration and discovery and interprets their narrative status. The incorporation of the past attempts to «penetrate» (the verb repeatedly used in the text) the South Pole is more than an effort to beguile the reader into accepting the ensuing adventures as reality based on scientific observation. By appropriating the real accounts into his fiction, Poe treats them as «writing», as literature. In chapter 16 the author suggests that the narratives of discovery concern the "first man", in this case, the first to make the discovery and then return to tell the tale, either in person or in writing, the first to record the discovery in the narrative of history. Therefore, discovery, originality, and writing are interrelated:

It is writing, then, that constitutes the *originality* of the first man to enter an unknown region, whether that writing is an inscription left on a rock or tree to mark the place and time of discovery, or a journal of the expedition brought back to civilization, or a narrative written after the explorer's return. One of the principal activities of the first man to discover a new region is the same as that of the mythic first man in the garden of Eden — to name things as yet unnamed. (Irwin 71)

The South Pole is the area of Pym's imaginary exploration because, as he emphasizes in the summary of Antarctic expeditions, its mystery has not yet been solved, its white abyss has not yet been penetrated. Around the time of *The Narrative's* publication (1837), many controversial theories

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2. Critics have suggested that *The Narrative* is primarily a satire. See, for example, Pollin's introduction to Poe's *Collected Works*, Vol. 1 (4-17) and Hinz.

concerning the South pole aroused the public's interest. Poe seemed particularly interested in a strange theory, known as «Symmes's Hole», claiming that the earth is hollow and open at the poles<sup>3</sup>. By 1830s Symmes' doctrine had become so popular that it was used by Jeremiah N. Reynolds to promote an expedition to the Antarctic. The popularity of Reynolds' *Address on the Subject of a Survey and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas* and Benjamin Morell's *Narrative of Four Voyages to the South Seas*, Poe's major sources for chapter 16, renewed the public's interest in the last *terra incognita*, in the last impenetrable secret.

As the last unexplored and uncharted land, the Antarctic suggested a Utopia. The polar region associated with an absolute whiteness embodied an additional mythology for some white Americans, especially for Southerners such as Poe<sup>4</sup>. Characteristically, in the fictional narrative *Symzonia, A Voyage of Discovery* (1820), possibly written by Symmes himself, the South Pole becomes a «white man's Utopia of pure and perfect reason — reserved for perfect whites» (Beaver 12).

On the other hand, in the Antarctic the total and blinding whiteness of the snow obliterates color differences; the rhythmic pattern of day and night, light and dark, collapses into an extended period of daylight and darkness. In chapter 18 Poe introduces the white and black opposition which will culminate at the end of *The Narrative* in the separation of Tsalal (the island of the black natives, «the most wicked, hypocritical, vindictive, bloodthirsty, and altogether fiendish race of men upon the face of the globe» 202; ch. 24) from the polar realm of Tekeli-li, the embodiment of whiteness. From chapter 17 onward, Pym casts his narrative in the form of a journal, following the tradition of other Antarctic explorers. The journal is a form of composition governed by the passage of days, by the rhythmic oscillation of light and dark. However, as Pym footnotes at the beginning of chapter 18, the alternation of light and dark has broken down after the ship's entrance into the polar latitudes:

The terms *morning* and *evening*, which I have made use of to avoid

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3. John Cleves Symmes, an ex-captain of infantry living in St. Louis, published in 1818 a manifesto claiming that the earth consisted of five concentric spheres with access through «holes at the Poles» so wide that a voyager «might pass from the outer side... over the rim and down upon the inner side a great distance before becoming aware of the fact at all» (qtd. in Beaver 11). In 1820 possibly Symmes under a pseudonym published *Symzonia, A Voyage of Discovery*, a fiction describing the discovery at the Antarctic of a land of perfect whiteness, inhabited by a perfectly white race. Moreover, in 1826 James McBride published *The Symmes Theory of Concentric Spheres, demonstrating that the earth is hollow, habitable, and widely open about the poles*.

4. Poe called himself a Virginian and scorned Boston (his actual birthplace) and its abolitionists. He served the interests and shared the racial prejudices and fears of the Richmond gentry. See Beaver 14-18.

confusion in my narrative, as far as possible, must not, of course, be taken in their ordinary sense. For a long time past we had no night at all, the daylight being continual. The dates throughout are according to nautical time, and the bearings must be understood as per compass. I would also remark, in this place, that I cannot, in the first portion of what is here written, pretend to strict accuracy in respect to dates, or latitudes, having kept no regular journal until after the period of which the first portion treats. In many instances, I have relied altogether upon memory.

(166-167 footnote)

The collapsing of the alternation between light and dark questions the other polar oppositions of the text, not only the opposition between Tsalal and Tekeli-li but also the black and white opposition of the written page, the black ink on the white paper. By stressing uncertainty, memory and fiction, Poe undermines the status of his own text as a narrative of (pseudo) scientific exploration and discovery. The footnote seems to cast doubt on the narrative techniques used to «deceive» the reader, such as the journal form, the realistic details (latitudes and longitudes) and descriptions of alien places and people, and the incorporation of Antarctic exploration narratives.

Furthermore, in spite of the journal form of *The Narrative's* final part, the narrator has already made clear in the preface that the entire story was written only after he returned from the voyage. He has also confessed there that his writing followed Poe's «narrative of the earlier portion of [Pym's] adventures... published in the Southern Messenger under the garb of fiction». In the footnote, Pym repeats that he has relied altogether upon memory, in case the reader has forgotten. Rather than hoaxing the reader, the author adopts the traditional genre of the travel account and then questions its own reliability, juxtaposing as well as fusing fiction and fact, pure fantasy and scientific observation.

Therefore, the footnote about the breakdown of day and night in the polar region suggests the absurdity of presenting Pym's adventures as a journal and also affects his earlier display of the history of the Antarctic explorers. Time and place, the constants and conventions of all travel and exploration texts are simultaneously followed and subverted. Is the author implying that the act of discovery, the penetration of the *terra incognita*, transcends the so-called objective method?

Ironically, the account of the real expeditions to the South Pole introduces the final section of an increasingly allegorical voyage which leads to ambiguous discoveries. Pym begins by summarizing Captain Cook's explorations in 1772-73, quoting from J. N. Reynolds' *Address*. Then Pym discusses the voyages of Kreutzenstern and Lisiausky (1803),

Captain James Wedell (1822), Captain Benjamin Morell of the American schooner *Wasp* (1823) and Captain Briscoe (1831). The narrator closes chapter 16 as a new explorer, full of anticipation to carry out successfully the unfinished quest of his predecessors:

These are the principal attempts which have been made at penetrating to a high southern latitude, and it will now be seen that there remained, previous to the voyage of the *Jane*, nearly three hundred degrees of longitude in which the Antarctic circle had not been crossed at all. Of course a wide field lay before us for discovery, and it was with feelings of most intense interest that I heard Captain Guy express his resolution of pushing boldly to the southward. (162)

The paragraph, deriving from Reynolds' *Address* (96), serves to imbue the «deficient» Captain Guy with the «resolution» of the tireless and ardent advocate of polar expedition<sup>5</sup>. Aboard the *Jane Guy*, Pym, the immature boy who ran away from home in search of adventure, becomes a serious navigator who shows a scientific interest in exploring new and unknown territories, capable of persuading the captain of the *Jane Guy* to sail southward, to cross the line between known and unknown regions, and to gain the sense of overreaching human limitations which comes with crossing such a line<sup>6</sup>.

The sense of transcending limits is associated with Poe's favorite theme of the «imp of the perverse», the will to disaster that constitutes Pym's constant motivation for action. Although the ship's captain becomes anxious to return home, Pym urges him to push farther into the unknown South. Pym's perverse impulse towards the fulfilment of the prophetic visions of suffering and despair which, as he confesses, «amount to desires» (65; ch. 2) relates to the quest for exploration and discovery. In the beginning of the narrative, after the shipwreck of the *Ariel*, Pym explains his visions — or desires — which by the end prove prophetic:

It is strange, too, that he [Augustus] most strongly enlisted my feelings on behalf of the life of a seaman when he depicted his more terrible moments of suffering and despair. For the bright side of the

5. Poe praised Reynolds' speech to Congress in 1836 and later deplored his exclusion from the national Antarctic expedition under Lieutenant Wilkes. The writer probably identified himself with the advocate of polar voyages. Characteristically, Poe's last delirious cries before he died at Baltimore's Washington College Hospital were «Reynolds! Reynolds! Oh, Reynolds!» (Beaver 14).

6. At the end of chapter 17, Pym convinces Captain Guy to «push on», although the latter wants to return because of shortage of fuel and symptoms of scurvy among the crew: «So tempting an opportunity of solving the great problem in regard to an Antarctic continent had never been afforded to man, and I confess that I felt myself bursting with indignation at the timid and ill-timed suggestions of our commander. I believe, indeed, that what I could not refrain from saying to him on this had the effect of inducing him to push on» (164-5).

painting I had limited sympathy. My visions were of shipwreck and famine, of death and captivity among barbarian hordes, a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some grey and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. (65; ch. 2)

Assuming his new role of explorer — and eventual discoverer of Tsalal — Pym realizes his desire, the «prophetic glimpses of his destiny» (65; ch. 2). Indeed, like all travel and exploration narratives, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* includes a projection of the narrator's desires on the description of the new land. Examining the tradition of exotic European travel writing, Mary Campbell argues that the genre places facts «in the context of an autobiographical form concerned with the alien and unrecognizable», and develops as a «literary instrument of consciousness» (5). By disguising his fiction as a genre which traditionally blends myth and fact, expectation and experience, Poe, in the tradition of Mandeville, subverts as well as extends the possibilities of the genre, emphasizing its self-referential and allegorical aspects.

Part scientific and part imaginative, the geography of the *terra incognita* envelops the unconscious; the explorer's voyage starts from within. The exploration of unknown lands is associated with a sense of transgression and with a quest for origin. Discovery realizes the transgression of human limitations, «as if, in the case of the quest for origin, man attempted to confront a forbidden primal scene. The womblike abyss that becomes the goal of Poe's voyages bears an Oedipal prohibition» (Irwin 70). As a psychoanalytic allegory, the unknown realm of the South Pole represents not only a projection of the explorer's unconscious, but also the womb, the image that attracts and entraps Poe throughout the narrative, from the dark, womblike hiding place of the *Grampus* (ch. 2) to the black cave in Tsalal (ch. 21)<sup>7</sup>. Both hiding place and cave are associated with premature burial, a constant preoccupation in Poe's fiction. In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, womb and trap, birth and death are constantly confused.

Poe's obsession with womblike imagery recalls the quest for source and origin associated with the Antarctic exploration. Popular pseudo-scientific theories of the time, such as Symmes', maintained that the Pole was a passage, or source, leading to the interior of the earth. Water was believed to rush into the earth at the polar abysses, then to be conveyed in a circular system through subterranean passageways to the equator,

7. Mary Bonaparte, one of the first critics of Poe to use a psychoanalytic method (her work *Edgar Poe, sa vie — son œuvre: étude analytique*, with an introduction by Freud, was published in 1933), interprets the episode in the black cave of Tsalal as a fantasy of return to the mother: «the exploration of the island's dark bowels, whose rivers are veins of blood, would represent a phantasy of return to the mother, expressed in anal or intestinal terms» (341-4).

and then to issue again from the earth through fountains like those forming the source of the Blue Nile (Irwin 81). In his *Address* to the Congress, Jeremiah Reynolds, while championing a national Antarctic expedition, combined Symmesian doctrine with nationalism and quest for origin with desire for global domination. The nation conquering the Antarctic would automatically control the interior of the earth:

What man can do, they [American seamen] always felt ready to attempt, — what man has done, it is their character to feel able to do, — whether it be to grapple with an enemy on the deep, or to pursue their gigantic game under the burning line, with an intelligence and ardour that insure success, or pushing their adventurous barks into the high southern latitudes, to circle the globe within the Antarctic circle, and attain the Pole itself; — yeah, to cast anchor on that point where all the 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! — where amid the novelty, grandeur and sublimity of the scene, the vessels, instead of sweeping a vast circuit by the diurnal movements of the earth, would simply turn round once in twenty-four hours! (99)

Pym's interest and excitement about the entrance into the unknown territory of the South Pole responds to the above call of combined nationalism and sublimity, accomplishment and mystery. Reynolds' association of nationalistic pride with masculine achievement is suggested in chapter 16 of *The Narrative* by the use of verbs such as «penetrate» (repeated four times), «take possession» and «push boldly to the southward», when Pym refers to the exploration of the South Pole. The vocabulary of the exploration and conquest of the *terra incognita* (unknown, mysterious and threatening) is sexually charged. Pym's desire to explore the Antarctic, to be the first man to attain the source of the earth, which compelled him in the beginning of the story to deceive and abandon his loving father, bears an Oedipal prohibition. Pym continues an act of transgression combining pleasure and suffering from the point where all the previous «real» explorers have had to withdraw.

Moreover, the text associates origin with race: as a racial allegory, the Antarctic enacts the desire for a white utopia. Tsalal, the island of darkness, where even the inhabitants' teeth are black, functions as a negative mirror, reflecting the fears of white America and identifies the black as the Other. However, instead of encountering white Symzonia, Pym narrowly escapes from a black land to a whirlpool of absolute whiteness impossible to narrate. As the author says in a note following *The Narrative*, «the few remaining chapters which were to have completed [Pym's] narrative... have been irrevocably lost through the accident by

which he perished himself». Pym, unlike the half-white Peters who is still alive at the time of publication (as the author says at the note), survives the Antarctic voyage but not its inscription.

The quest for origin in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is also textual. By encompassing the accounts of previous Antarctic explorations, the narrator introduces the theme of origin to emphasize originality. When Pym summarizes «the progress of discovery in these regions», he begins with Captain Cook's expedition. Although the British Captain Cook was not the first to try exploring the Antarctic, Pym notes that Cook's expedition «was the first of which we have any distinct account» (158; ch. 16). The narrator refers to Captain Cook's two attempts to go as far South as possible to discover «a new continent» and to his eventual retreat because of the ice:

In January 1773, the vessels crossed the Antarctic circle, but did not succeed in penetrating much farther, for, upon reaching latitude 67° 15', they found all further progress impeded by an immense body of ice, extending all along the southern horizon, as far as the eyes could reach... In November following, he renewed his search in the Antarctic... In latitude 71° 10', longitude 106° 54' W, the navigators were stopped, as before, by an immense frozen expanse, which filled the whole area of the southern horizon... Captain Cook concluded that this vast field reached the southern pole or was joined to a continent. (159).

The summary of Captain Cook's voyage takes up most of the chapter on the past attempts to explore the South Pole. Although chapter 16 derives almost verbatim from Reynolds' *Address* (90-96), Poe had probably read Captain Cook's exploration journals and observed how Cook projected his fears and desires to the *terra incognita*. Captain Cook is very proud to be the first to cross the Antarctic circle, a typical example of the explorer's pride to be the first to cross the line between the known and the unknown, the first to penetrate the alien land and plant there his nation's flag, the first to return after the discovery and tell the tale, the first to write the event in the narrative of history:

Sunday 17th January (1773) ... At about a 1/4 past 11 O'Clock we crossed the Antarctic Circle, for at Noon we were by observation four Miles and a half South of it and are undoubtedly the first and only Ship that ever crossed that line... (113)

However, Captain Cook does not manage to proceed further South to explore the Pole because «the ice was so thick and close» and «the summer already half spent» (113). He tries again at the same time the next year, and reaches (on January 24th) latitude 70° and longitude 107° 27', but there he stops because of an immense icefield blocking his way.

Captain Cook's description of these immense masses of ice, of the whiteness and brightness of the ice and sky, evokes a sense of the alien, mysterious and sublime, reminiscent of *The Narrative's* ending:

Saturday 29th January... A little after 4 a.m. we perceived the Clouds to the South near the horizon to be of an unusual Snow white brightness which denounced our approach to field ice... The clouds near the horizon were of a perfect Snow whiteness and were difficult to be distinguished from the ice hills whose lofty summits reached the clouds. The outer or Northern edge of this immense icefield was composed of loose or broken ice so close packed together that nothing could enter it... (149-150)

The «perfect Snow whiteness» of clouds and sky makes the horizon disappear; sea, land and sky merge into a single indefinite substance that envelops and disorients the spectator. The white panorama with its sublimity and terror recalls the whiteness which envelops Pym's boat in the last chapter of *The Narrative*. Whereas in Cook's journal the whiteness is associated with cold and ice, in Pym's account it is accompanied with heat and vapour (and the narrator stresses the fact that far South «no ice whatever was to be seen» 203; ch. 25). Both passages, however, evoke a similar feeling of awe, a combined fear and attraction, as both explorers, the real and the imaginary, are attracted by a strange power into this overwhelming whiteness. While Captain Cook, as a prudent captain, decides to retreat, Pym and his dark double Peters are drawn, without being able to react, to the vortex, to the summit of the white cataract:

March 21... We were nearly overwhelmed by the white ashy shower which settled upon us and upon the canoe, but melted into the water as it fell. The summit of the cataract was utterly lost in the dimness and the distance. Yet we were evidently approaching it with a hideous velocity... (Poe 206; ch. 25)

Unlike Pym, who upon entering the «region of novelty and wonder» feels no alarm «at the turn events were taking» but instead «a numbness of body and mind — a dreaminess of sensation» (204-205; ch. 25), Captain Cook panicks when he confronts the «perfect whiteness and grandeur» of the South Pole. His writing of the decision to end the Antarctic expedition at this point reveals the inexplicable fear of invading this sublime region, and the need to defend and rationalize what escaped his rational understanding:

Sunday 30th January. Anywhere to get in among this ice, but I will assert that the bare attempting of it would be a very dangerous enterprise and what I believe no man in my situation would have thought of. I whose ambition leads me not only farther than any other

man has been before me, but as far I think it possible for man to go, was not sorry at meeting with this interruption, as it in some measure relieved us from the dangers and hardships, inseparable with the Navigation of the Southern Polar regions. (150)

The absolute whiteness could either cover a new land or just delude the explorer. As Captain Cook repeats in his journal, he is getting tired of «searching after those imaginary lands», of confronting ever so often visions of danger, failure and delusion. Since his «firstness», his originality in discovering and possessing new regions, has already been confirmed and he has been «farther than any other man has been before [him]», Cook allows himself to claim that the southern continent does not really exist:

Sunday 6th February... the expedition would have been finished so far as it related to the finding of a Southern Continent mentioned by all Authors who have written on this subjects whose assertions and conjectures are now entirely refuted... (151)

Therefore, fact refutes fiction, the scientific and objective explorer discredits the unnamed authors who have created an imaginary continent.

Poe begins his explorer's voyage exactly at the point where Captain Cook stopped his: where the anticipated new land proved imaginary, where the reality of the quest became unreal. Pym desires the dangers and hardships «inseparable with the Polar regions» that Cook was anxious to avoid. Crossing the limit where Cook ended his exploration and «pushing boldly to the southward», the voyage of Arthur Gordon Pym transgresses the border between bipolar oppositions, white and black, day and night, desire and fear, quest and discovery. What Pym finds at the end, the encounter with the titanic shrouded human figure, whose skin «was of the perfect whiteness of snow», reinforces rather than resolves the mystery of the South Pole and safeguards the taboo of the *terra incognita*. The abrupt and enigmatic end of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is the only possible end to a voyage centering around fictitious facts and factual fictions, a voyage which invites and subverts allegories.

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## ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

## ΑΝΤΑΡΚΤΙΚΕΣ ΟΥΤΟΠΙΕΣ

Ευτέρπη Μήτση, *Η αφήγηση του Άρθουρ Γκόρντον Πυμ, του Edgar Allan Poe και η εξερεύνηση του νότιου πόλου.*

*Η αφήγηση του Άρθουρ Γκόρντον Πυμ*, μια περιπετειώδης ιστορία εξερεύνησης και ανακάλυψης, παρουσιάζει ένα φανταστικό ταξίδι στο νότιο πόλο. Ο Ροε μέσω του τίτλου αλλά και μέσω της αφηγηματικής του τεχνικής συνδέει το έργο του με μια συγκεκριμένη λογοτεχνική παράδοση, τα ταξιδιωτικά κείμενα που περιγράφουν την εξερεύνηση, την ανακάλυψη και συχνά την κατάκτηση της άγνωστης χώρας. Η παράδοση αυτή συσχετίζει το ταξίδι στην *terra incognita* με την ταυτόχρονη καταγραφή της στην ιστορική μνήμη της Δύσης. Το έργο του Ροε πραγματοποιεί μια διπλή καταγραφή, αφενός την πλασματική εξερεύνηση ενός ουτοπικού νότιου πόλου, και αφετέρου την εξερεύνηση ενός λογοτεχνικού είδους: ο συγγραφέας όχι μόνο ταυτίζει το λόγο του με αυτόν των πραγματικών εξερευνητών της Ανταρκτικής, όπως του Captain James Cook, αλλά και αντιγράφει αποσπάσματα από τα κείμενά τους, μια πράξη οικειοποίησης και κριτικής που υπονομεύει την επιστημονική μέθοδο και την αντικειμενικότητά τους.

Χαρακτηριστικά, ο Πυμ, ο αφηγητής του Ροε, ξεκινά την εξερεύνησή τους από το γεωγραφικό σημείο όπου οι (πραγματικοί) προκάτοχοί του αναγκάστηκαν να σταματήσουν, και σιγά - σιγά εισέρχεται σε έναν χώρο όπου το πραγματικό ταυτίζεται με το πλασματικό. Η Ανταρκτική του Ροε αντιπροσωπεύει ένα μύθο αρχής και καταγωγής με ψυχολογικές, πολιτικές αλλά και κειμενολογικές προεκτάσεις. Το αινιγματικό τέλος υπονοεί ότι η διείσδυση του αφηγητή στην *terra incognita* είναι ταυτόχρονα παράβαση και υπέρβαση. Το λογοτεχνικό ταξίδι του Πυμ ανατρέπει τις αλληγορίες που έχει προκαλέσει, παραβιάζοντας τα σύνορα μεταξύ οριακών αντιθέτων, μεταξύ άσπρου και μαύρου, ημέρας και νύχτας, αναζήτησης και ανακάλυψης, πραγματικότητας και φαντασίας.