
RESEARCH ARTICLE

On the Prophecy of Antarctic Ecological Crisis in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*

Qi Lei

Master, Departure of Foreign Languages, Shanghai Ocean University, Shanghai, China

Corresponding Author: Qi Lei, E-mail: lq15887016563@163.com

ABSTRACT

The theme of Antarctic exploration is one of the prominent subjects in American author Edgar Allan Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. This theme did not arise by chance but is closely connected to the social environment of Poe's era and country. This paper aims to provide an ecological interpretation of the Antarctic exploration episodes in the novel, particularly focusing on Poe's foresight regarding the ecological crisis in Antarctica. First, through textual analysis, this paper reveals Poe's profound description of Antarctica, showcasing his keen insight into the natural environment and human behavior, as well as his deep understanding of society and history as a writer. Second, this paper will explore the history of American Antarctic exploration and, using this background, discuss in detail how Poe's work unveils America's desire for Antarctic resources and the potential ecological crises such desire might bring. Furthermore, the paper will analyze Poe's depiction of Antarctic explorers and his reasons for focusing his creative vision on Antarctica in the 1830s. Lastly, the paper will examine the implications of Poe's ecological awareness to inspire contemporary society's reflection on environmental protection.

KEYWORDS

Antarctica; Ecological Crisis; Maritime Expansion; Edgar Allan Poe; *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 19 March 2025

PUBLISHED: 07 April 2025

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2025.8.4.11

1. Introduction

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket (hereafter referred to as *Pym*) is a pioneering work of nautical adventure literature by the famous American author Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). The protagonist of this novel is Arthur Gordon Pym, who undergoes a series of sea expeditions, and voyages that eventually take him to the unexplored lands of Antarctica. Through the fictionalized narrative of the Antarctic expedition, Pym vividly illustrates the extreme conditions and unique ecosystems of Antarctica. Not only is it a gripping adventure story, but it is also a literary exploration of ecological themes in the early days of America's outward expansion. In the story, Pym's journey to Antarctica is filled with challenges from nature, such as treacherous ice and extreme cold, showing the vulnerability of human beings in the face of nature. At the same time, Poe's descriptions of Antarctica reflect America's scientific curiosity about the unexplored region at the time, and the depictions of the mysterious creatures, in particular, emphasize America's imagination of the biodiversity and mystery of Antarctica. These elements not only reveal the potential impact of human activity on the pristine environment but also hint at the challenges of resource scarcity faced by imperial expansion.

Edgar Allan Poe's achievements not only had a profound impact on American literature but also laid the foundation for modern psychological, thriller, and detective fiction. However, the study of Edgar Allan Poe and his major works did not receive much attention from the United States and the entire critical community until years after the 1930s. Scholars at home and abroad have focused their attention on the following core aspects: the theme of death (Zhu, Z. W. & Zhang, X. L., 2010; Liu, L. & Xiang, Y., 2020), psychological depiction (Pruette, L., 1930; Shao, W. J., 2018), gothic fictional narrative (Han, H. J., 2014), and analysis of women's images in the works (Stovall, 1945), to name but few, which can be countless, but show a certain degree of consensus and convergence.

Pym, on the other hand, is one of the few serialized long novels published in 1838. Regarding the study of this long novel, previous scholars have explored the natural cognition of the status quo of 19th-century American capitalist society that it maps out (Li, Y.

Copyright: © 2025 the Author(s). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). Published by Al-Kindi Centre for Research and Development, London, United Kingdom.

J., 2009); some scholars have also analyzed the significance of *Pym* in terms of the cultural marketplace where the content of its creation is duplicated by the author's previous works (Jin, H. S., 2001). In addition, the Antarctic imagery in the work is also a major focus of scholars. Studies on the subject either speak to the racial bias embedded in the work (Wijkmark, J., 2009) or analyze Poe's concerns about the failure of America's overseas expansion plans (Zhang, J., 2017). However, the number of scholarly studies of *Pym* has always been in the minority, and there has been some and a lack of exploration of the work's Antarctic expedition about the expansion of the United States and Antarctic ecology of his time. Therefore, this article examines Poe's *Pym* within the specific historical context of the United States at that time, explaining from an ecological perspective the multiple reasons for Edgar Allan Poe's focus on Antarctic ecology in his work and his anxiety about the coming ecological crisis, and helping the world to understand the environmental challenges and ecological dynamics of one of the planet's most isolated and least-known regions.

2. Continuity and History of American Antarctic Exploration

The book of *Pym* consists of 25 chapters, which can be divided into two major parts in terms of the novel's content. Edgar Allan Poe's creative style is full of dark and mysterious colors, and his works often involve the themes of death, insanity, and the supernatural, therefore, *Pym* inherits Edgar Allan Poe's consistent gothic writing style, which is concentrated in the first part, i.e., the first to the thirteenth chapter of the novel. The first part of the novel focuses on Pym and his party experiencing various almost surreal sea adventures at sea. The second part of the novel, chapters fourteen through twenty-five, unfolds a completely new theme - the Antarctic sailing expedition.

The theme of Antarctic exploration in the novel was not an accidental choice by Edgar Allan Poe, but a choice that weighed the aesthetics of the marketplace of readers against the history of seafaring expansion of the U.S.A. The boom of popular magazines in the nineteenth century contributed to the emergence of professional writers in the U.S.A., and the "traditionally conceived of as an elegant activity of writing had been downgraded to an occupational aspiration necessary for survival" (Luo, X. M., 2006). First, it was in January-February 1837 that the Southern Literary Messenger serialized the first two chapters of *Pym*. At the time, Poe was the editor of the magazine. To survive the competition, popular magazines often needed to tailor their works to the tastes and needs of their target readers, which to a certain extent could diminish the quality of the art itself. However, due to a drinking problem, Poe was fired from his job. And then, forced to make ends meet, Poe, hoping to extend his literary influence and commercial success with a full-length work, took advantage of the public's reading preference for travel and nautical narratives, and in particular its enthusiasm for the possibility of unraveling the mysteries of the American Antarctic Exploring Expeditionary Voyage, and in July 1838 he completed the serialized publication of *Pym*.

With regard to the history of Antarctic exploration, the controversy over 'who was the first to discover the continent' continues to this day. The United Kingdom credits British captain Edward Bransfield, the former Soviet Union credits its naval officer Thaddeus von Bellingshausen, and the United States credits Nathaniel Palmer with being the first to discover the Antarctic Peninsula in 1820. The first official confirmation of the existence of the Antarctic continent came in 1839-1840, when an expedition financed by a combination of nations, led by U.S. naval officer Charles Wilkes, penetrated the continent. It was not until the publication of the narrative of the U.S. Exploring Expedition in 1845 that the American public really began to gain a comprehensive understanding of Antarctica (Leane, 2004). There is no doubt, however, that U.S. exploration in Antarctica began almost simultaneously with the founding of the U.S., has the longest history of expeditions, and has the widest range of activities (Chen, 2013).

Among other things, the conception of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* was influenced by several real-life events in the United States at the time, particularly the extensive reports of exploration and scientific discoveries in the Antarctic region in the late 1820s and early 1830s. One major influence was the proposed Antarctic expedition of American explorer Jeremiah N. Reynolds and his description of the Antarctic region as full of potential. Reynolds was a radical explorer whose ideas and proposals attracted widespread attention in the United States, including a public lecture in Congress in 1836. Reynolds placed great importance on the extent to which American development was linked to the sea, and for his own country he argued early on that "from the first day of our existence we have been a commercial people" (Reynolds, 1835). The first half of the nineteenth century was a period of rapid development of capitalist industry and commerce in the United States, and Reynolds followed the trend. Reynolds emphasized the need for exploration to prove that American seafaring expansion was in keeping with the zeitgeist of the time, as the great powers of the world, except the United States, were sending naval expeditions in search of new lands. Reynolds then organized a private scientific expedition involving three sealing captains (Almy, 1927). Upon his return to the United States in 1834, Reynolds rejoined the effort to promote a national expedition, which was ultimately successful, earning him the reputation as the "Father of American Exploration". His campaign to realize the major scientific and cultural achievements of the 19th century attracted the attention of the government, the scientific community, and the arts. Many of the leading scientists of the time were also involved in Reynolds' actions.

On the Prophecy of Antarctic Ecological Crisis in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym

Second, the U.S. Antarctic expedition was not the first human attempt to make routes to and around the Antarctic and related areas. Throughout the novel, Poe makes several references to historical explorers, such as the "Frenchman Baron de Kergulen" (Poe, 1838: 221) who discovered the islands southeast of the Cape of Good Hope among others, the British "Captain Cook" (Poe, 1838: 221) who met the islands again, and the American "Captain Colquhoun" (Poe, 1838: 230), who traveled to the South Pole to collect seal skins in 1790. Among them, the novel details Captain James Cook's foray into Antarctic waters as early as 1772. At the time, one of its missions was to explore the Antarctic Circle to prove or disprove the existence of the continent. On this voyage, Cook led two of his ships - the *Resolution* and the *Adventure* - to successfully cross the Antarctic Circle, and "he charted New Zealand and later traveled south as far as latitude 70 degrees" (Cook, 1995/2013:579). Although Cook did not confirm the existence of the Antarctic continent, he traveled farther than any previous European explorer, and his accounts provide a wealth of data on marine life and climate.

In a speech named *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploration Expedition to the Pacific and South Seas*, Reynolds was eager for his country to prove itself through maritime expansion and to gain honors that had not been achieved by countries such as England. He made a passionate speech, saying that: "Have we not sufficiently shown that exploration is for the dignity and honor of nations? Have we not sufficiently shown that it is our position among the commercial nations that requires us to act accordingly, to explore and survey new islands, distant seas, and uncharted lands" (Reynolds, 1836: 70). Reynolds elevated seafaring expansion to the level of a matter of national interest and the future of the nation, highlighting the progress made by European nations in the field of Antarctic exploration, the potentially great benefits of the Antarctic region to American commerce, and the potential contribution the United States could make to the development of global science, and calling for the nation to respond to the current of history by ushering in a new era of U.S. seafaring expansion. All of this greatly mobilized the emotional and psychological support of the public.

Thus, Poe was largely inspired by Reynolds' radical and romanticized account of Antarctica when he wrote *Pym*. In the novel, Poe not only directly quotes Reynolds' questioning of the results of the Royal Geographical Society of London's expedition to the Antarctic region in Pym's trip to the South Pole, stating that "In the correctness of it we by no means concur" (Poe, 1838: 237). Additionally, Poe uses Pym to praise the idea of seafaring expansion as represented by Reynolds, arguing that "My own experience will be found to testify most directly to the falsity of the conclusion arrived at by the society." (Poe, 1838: 237). These descriptions express Poe's confidence in the Antarctic trips of the American seafaring expansion, and while emphasizing the mystery of uncharted territories and the romanticism of exploration, they fit with Poe's literary interests and style, and can also be read as a political representation catering to American exploitation, corresponding to the national situation and public mood of his time.

3. Potential and Peril Expressed in Poe's Ecological Consciousness

Through the above mentioned background of the era of American Antarctic exploration, it can be seen that Edgar Allan Poe composed *Pym* during the period of the growing boom of Antarctic exploration and overseas expansion in the United States between the years of 1810 and 1840. The Antarctic continent was the last continent to be discovered in the world, a vast region whose boundaries are defined by the South Antarctic Circle, "a land not found to be inhabited within the Antarctic Circle" (Hale, H., 1885: 92). Although ancient civilizations speculated about the existence of the Antarctic, it was not until the early 19th century that mankind first confirmed the existence of the continent. However, Antarctica, as the world's "Last Pure Land", will certainly lead to changes in its ecology as a result of human footsteps.

In the 1830s, ecoliterary criticism had not yet taken shape as a clearly defined academic field in the United States. However, according to the scholar Wang Nuo, "the object of ecocriticism's study and comment is by no means only contemporary ecological and anti-ecological literature, and even more by no means only works directly depicting nature, but literature as a whole" (Wang, N., 2013:26). Some literary works and ideas of this period have begun to touch upon themes related to the natural environment and ecology. Poe had a certain ecological consciousness, and in Poe's ecological thought not only contained the writer's own attitude towards the development of Antarctica, but also epitomized the relationship between man and nature in the context of the big time. His many depictions of the Antarctic natural environment in *Pym* and the interaction between man and nature in this expedition together constitute a prophetic ecology of the Antarctic ecological crisis.

3.1 Potentials of Antarctic exploration

The Antarctic, as an unexplored territory, symbolizes unlimited possibilities and opportunities. As mentioned earlier, Reynolds, speaking as a whaler and seal hunter, believed that the United States should actively participate in the surveys and explorations of the Pacific by the European powers, proving and constructing itself through more proactive scientific discovery and commercial expansion. In his 1836 speech to the House of Representatives, Reynolds also emphasized the mission of the National Expedition to rescue those unfortunate persons of all nations who may be found on inhospitable islands or among savage tribes (Reynolds, 1984), and the conflict between the natives and the landers is mirrored in the plot of *Pym*. Analyzing the portrayal of the Antarctic environment and ecosystem in the novel, one can find Arthur Gordon Pym and his party's expectation and salvation for the Antarctic resources, as well as the United States' expectation for seafaring expansion to the Antarctic at the time.

In the novel, *Pym*, the main character, travels to the Antarctic by means of a departs from Liverpool, England, and is "bound on a sealing and trading voyage to the South Seas and Pacific" (Poe, 1838: 207). On this voyage, Pym witnessed the diversity of life, from the abundance of elephant seals and whales to the thousands of exotic birds that soar in the sky, even the species of fish found on a small island, and during his visit he "We saw, during our visit, a quantity of dried salmon, rock cod, blue dolphins, mackerel, blackfish, skate, conger eels, elephantfish, mullets, soles, parrotfish, leather-jackets, gurnards, hake, flounders, paracutas, and innumerable other varieties" (Poe, 1838: 257). In terms of the natural environment, the ocean is the place where life on earth was first born, and its vastness and depths have never been fully explored and deciphered by mankind, and are therefore full of unlimited possibilities and opportunities for exploration. Edgar Allan Poe imagined an archipelago in the southern hemisphere's high-latitude oceans to be lush and green, and that "The shore was precipitous, and the interior seemed to be well wooded, a circumstance which occasioned us great joy" (Poe, 1838: 245). The diversity of life and the pristine ecology of nature show Poe's curiosity and anticipation of unveiling this Antarctic region, believing that its wonders and beauties are mesmerizing, just as Poe's anticipation in the book through the mouth of Pym: "I must still be allowed to feel some degree of gratification at having been instrumental, however remotely, in opening to the eye of science one of the most intensely exciting secrets which has ever engrossed its attention." (Poe, 1838: 245).

In the 19th century, Edgar Allan Poe was in the Renaissance period of American literature, when the economy was booming and the country was growing stronger, inspiring people's infinite enthusiasm for western pioneering and ocean whaling. People's hearts surged with the desire for the ocean, eager to sail away and pursue the dream of adventure and wealth. Therefore, the novel is through the ecological portrayal of the Antarctic, reflecting the human desire for unknown territory and the romanticism of exploration, this spirit of exploration not only promotes scientific discovery, but also triggers a profound reflection on the natural world, which should prove that the United States will inevitably be active in Antarctic scientific research and investigation, and promote the governance of Antarctica and a series of Antarctic activities.

3.2 Perils hid beneath the Antarctic ecology

In the novel, Poe also reveals the dangers and uncertainties of polar exploration. On the one hand, Poe writes about the thriving ecology of Antarctica and affirms the positive attempts at scientific research that can be made by human beings who set foot in Antarctica. However, by depicting the harsh climate and mysterious phenomena of the Antarctic, as well as the trials and misadventures of Pym and his team during their expedition, Poe also expresses his reverence for the uncontrollable forces of nature and his concern for mankind's constant forays into the Antarctic purgatory.

First of all, whether it is the U.S. seafaring expansion to the Antarctic in the 1830s or the virtual Antarctic expedition in the novel, the U.S. seafaring expansion program to the Antarctic contains elements of anthropocentrism. Anthropocentrism, an ideology that places human interests and perspectives at the center of the natural world, is often expressed in literature as human control, conquest, and exploitation of nature, and was first critiqued by ecoliterary scholar Carson: "Human beings see themselves as the masters of all the material things of the earth, and believe that everything on the earth -- animate and inanimate, animal, vegetable, and mineral -- even the earth itself was created for man" (Gartner, 1983: 120). In *Pym*, the adventures of the protagonist Pym involve the exploration of the unknown and the outside world, always crossing human boundaries, and on their way deeper into the Antarctic hinterland, Pym and his party gain a better understanding of the ecology of the Antarctic region, as well as experiencing the challenges posed by the extremes of weather, the changing marine environment, disease, and the shortage of food and fresh water. As the expedition progresses, Pym and his team arrive at "82° 50' S. latitude, 42° 20' W. longitude" (Poe, 1838: 242), the indigenous island of where the Jane Guy was ambushed, massacred, and almost wiped out by the natives of the island. Finally, the story ends abruptly with the southward sea escape of Pym and his partner Peters, leaving the reader with infinite reverie. Through these storylines, Poe demonstrates mankind's endless curiosity, desire to explore and conquer the natural world. Whether it is the voyages of previous explorers around the Antarctic or Pym's current expedition, they are always serving human needs, either sailing in search of colonizable islands for political reasons or searching for bountiful biological resources for commercial gain. These elements exemplify the idea of anthropocentrism, the belief that humans have the right to explore, utilize, and even alter the natural environment to satisfy their own needs and desires. And Poe's protagonist, Arthur Gordon Pym, embodies the era's conflicted ethos. His declaration of contributing to the advancement of scientific knowledge mirrors the Enlightenment-era valorization of empirical discovery. Yet, Pym's scientific curiosity is inextricably tied to commercial exploitation. The crew's meticulous cataloging of Antarctic biodiversity—seals for oil, fish for trade—parallels the practices of real 19th-century expeditions, such as Charles Wilkes' U.S. Exploring Expedition (1838–1842), which combined hydrographic surveys with resource prospecting (Philbrick, 2003). Poe's inclusion of pseudo-scientific details, such as the "elephantfish" and "paracutas" (Poe, 1838, p. 257), satirizes the period's tendency to conflate exploration with exploitation. These fantastical creatures, absent from biological taxonomies, underscore the commodification of nature: even the unknown is reduced to marketable curiosities.

On the Prophecy of Antarctic Ecological Crisis in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym

The novel's ecological contradictions reflect broader cultural anxieties. The 1830s marked the peak of the American sealing industry, with Antarctic rookeries yielding over 340,000 sealskins annually (Stackpole, 1953). Yet, by the 1840s, overhunting had already triggered localized extinctions—a pattern Poe allegorizes through the Jane Guy's encounters with "islands once teeming with seals, now barren" (Poe, 1838, p. 88). This narrative prescience anticipates Garrett Hardin's "tragedy of the commons," where individual greed destroys shared resources (Hardin, 1968). Its pristine landscapes mirror America's self-image as a virgin continent, even as its degradation foreshadows the ecological costs of unchecked capitalism.

However, Poe has already recognized the perils of Antarctic exploration, and the novel's insightful reflections on the limitations of human cognition and capacity reflect his prescience in predicting the ecological crisis in Antarctica. Humanity's continued uncontrolled exploitation of Antarctica and its surrounding areas will bring about adverse ecological consequences, as reflected in the book. For example, many of the islands were once a mecca for hunting marine life, and "owing to the ease with which these various animals were here formerly taken, the group has been much visited since its discovery. The Dutch and French frequented it at a very early period" (Poe, 1838: 223) and could easily collect leopard skins and fill ships with seal oil; then the island became scarce, the creatures were hunted so much that even the island's biosystems were altered and filled with all the principal kinds of livestock introduced by later navigators. The extreme environment and existential challenges in the novel hint at the ecological crisis that mankind may face in its conquest of nature. The destructive effects of unchecked human exploration on the environment are predicted.

At the same time, many plots in *Pym* demonstrate the power and mystery of the natural environment, suggesting that mankind's understanding and control over the natural world is limited. For example, the Antarctic expedition described in the novel demonstrates fear of the unknown and awe of the forces of nature. In *Pym*, Poe depicts many strange and supernatural elements, such as the island of natives, which reveres the color black, and the mysterious white giant, which is "a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow" (Poe, 1838: 314). These may have been inspired by explorers such as Reynolds' descriptions of the unknown and mysterious regions of Antarctica. Additionally, Poe treats certain details in the novel and the open-endedness towards the end is used for ambiguity. Poe describes surreal and unusual temperatures, using the expressions such as "The weather might even be called pleasant" (Poe, 1838: 242) and "The heat of the water was extreme, even unpleasant to the touch" (Poe, 1838: 312) to characterize certain climatic features in the mid-to-high latitudes of the southern hemisphere, yet the true polar conditions are actually extremely cold, and the book's description of the weather is ambiguous and distorted. The ambiguity and distortion of the meteorological descriptions make it difficult for readers to tell if they have actually reached the South Pole, and can also be seen as a metaphor for ecological disaster. Scholar Harry (1967) believed that Edgar Allan Poe was shrewd enough not to delve into specific details about the South Pole at a time when real explorers were preparing to travel there. It could be argued that it was the lack of Antarctic knowledge of the authors and readers of the time that doomed parts of *Pym* to be portrayed beyond common sense, and that doomed its ending to lack completeness in the traditional sense of the word. This ending was skillfully designed to allow for extra-textual intervention at that historical juncture in the United States in the 1830s when the Antarctic exploration program was about to be carried out, while reflecting on the complex effects of anthropocentric human thought on the exploration and conquest of the natural world.

In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Edgar Allan Poe transforms Antarctica from a mere backdrop into a living, almost vengeful force that actively opposes human intrusion. The icy continent's jagged cliffs, oppressive fog, and eerie silence create an atmosphere far removed from the romanticized wilderness of typical adventure tales. Instead of inviting conquest, Poe's Antarctic landscape seems to repel it, as if the land itself resists being mapped or understood. This portrayal challenges the 19th-century belief that nature existed solely for human mastery, offering instead a vision of the natural world as indifferent—even hostile—to human ambitions.

The crew's journey reflects this tension. Initially, they approach Antarctica with the confidence typical of their era, viewing its uncharted territories as a blank canvas for exploration and profit. Yet as they venture deeper, the environment grows increasingly menacing. Towering ice formations loom like sentinels, while sudden storms and strange atmospheric phenomena disrupt their progress. These elements evoke a sense of awe mixed with terror, reminiscent of what philosopher Edmund Burke called the "sublime"—the overwhelming power of nature that humbles human observers. Poe amplifies this effect by emphasizing the crew's growing vulnerability: their tools fail, their maps prove useless, and their sense of control unravels.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the novel's enigmatic conclusion. As Pym and his companion drift into a milky-white abyss, they encounter a spectral giant shrouded in mist—a scene that defies logical explanation. Unlike traditional adventure stories, which often end with heroes claiming victory over nature, Poe leaves his characters trapped in a liminal space where reality blurs. This unresolved ending rejects the idea of human triumph, suggesting instead that some mysteries are beyond understanding. The Antarctic remains unconquered, its secrets intact, while the explorers' fate underscores the folly of assuming dominance over the unknown.

Poe's Antarctic thus serves as a mirror to human limitations. While his contemporaries wrote glowing accounts of territorial conquest, he crafted a cautionary tale about the dangers of arrogance. The novel's unsettling atmosphere and ambiguous finale remind readers that nature operates on its own terms, indifferent to human desires. In doing so, Poe not only critiques the exploitative mindset of his time but also foreshadows modern concerns about humanity's fragile relationship with the environment. His Antarctic is less a setting than a character—one that refuses to be tamed, challenging us to rethink our place within the natural world.

In terms of the dynamic relationship between man and Antarctic ecology, Poe's ecological consciousness embodied in this work offers many ecological insights for today's readers. In 1924, the U.S. government issued its first policy statement on the Antarctic: "In the case of terra nullius, mere discovery, even when accompanied by formal occupation, is not sufficient to constitute effective territorial sovereignty of a State over the terra nullius" (Chen, L., 2013). Although Antarctica remains a terra nullius in terms of political demarcation, it is an important part of the Earth as a common place for humankind, and should be treated with equal importance and care as an important ecological subsystem. Human beings should never regard nature as a tool or an objectified ego; future generations should use ecological responsibility and ecological ethics to support their interaction with nature, and should stand on the perspective of the human subject to realize the true equality and respect for the subject of natural objects.

4. Conclusion

Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is not only an adventure novel about the narrative of oceanic adventure, but also a literary record of and reflection on the 19th-century American Antarctic exploration boom and ecological crisis prophecy. In contemporary terms, *Pym* serves as both a historical mirror and a prophetic lens. Poe's fictionalized Antarctica—a space simultaneously mapped and mystified—parallels today's debates over Antarctic governance, where scientific collaboration contends with geopolitical resource claims. The novel's emphasis on ecological interconnectedness resonates with current discourses on climate tipping points and transnational environmental stewardship. Furthermore, Poe's critique of colonial "discovery" narratives prefigures postcolonial ecocriticism, challenging readers to re-examine the ethics of exploration in an era of escalating biodiversity loss. Through the deconstruction of the many ecological elements of Antarctic exploration, it can be found that Poe expresses a reverence for the natural world and a complex attitude towards the spirit of human exploration, and also shows his close attention to the natural environment and ecological balance, and has gained a certain prospective understanding of Antarctic ecological development. This paper analyzes the many Antarctic ecological environments and related issues in *Pym*, and finds that Poe, with the help of his unique literary perspective, keenly points out the possible damage of human exploratory behavior on natural environments and impact, and inspires readers to view the issue of Antarctic exploration from the prophetic perspective of the Antarctic ecological crisis, which is of contemporary relevance. In conclusion, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* is not only a classic of literature, but also an marine exploration important reference on topics and sustainable development, calling on us to pay more attention to ecological protection and sustainability strategies when exploring new territories about today's related ecological issues.

5. Study Limitations and Future Research

While this study offers a critical examination of ecological themes in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the analysis primarily relies on a single literary text, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Although *Pym* serves as a rich case study for exploring 19th-century ecological consciousness, its uniqueness as a Gothic adventure narrative limits direct comparisons with other contemporary works. Then, the historical contextualization of U.S. Antarctic exploration, while thorough, risks oversimplifying the complexities of 19th-century geopolitics. The study emphasizes American ambitions but does not fully address competing European colonial interests or the role of Indigenous knowledge in shaping early exploration narratives. To address these limitations and expand upon this study's findings, several avenues for future research emerge. Firstly, comparative analyses could deepen our understanding of ecological themes in 19th-century literature. Secondly, interdisciplinary approaches would enrich the historical and cultural context. Collaborations with environmental historians could trace how real-world Antarctic expeditions influenced literary depictions of nature. Finally, practical applications of this research could bridge literary studies and environmental policy. Scholars might investigate how *Pym*'s themes inform modern debates on Antarctic resource management or ecotourism. In conclusion, while this study illuminates Poe's prescient ecological vision, its limitations underscore the need for more inclusive and interdisciplinary approaches.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

References

- [1] Almy, R. (1927). J. N. Reynolds: A brief biography with particular reference to Poe and Symmes. *The Colophon*, (2), 227–234.
- [2] Carter, P. A. (1979). *Little America: Town at the end of the world*. Columbia University Press.
- [3] Chen, L. (2013). U.S. Antarctic policy and law. *American Studies*, 27(1), 66–80.
- [4] Cook, J. (2013). *Captain Cook's journal: The voyage of the "Resolution" and "Adventure", 1768–1771* (L. Bingren, Trans.). Commercial Press.
- [5] Gartner, C. B. (1983). Rachel Carson. *Frederick Ungar Publishing*.
- [6] Han, H. (2014). On Poe's inheritance and development of Gothic fiction. *Journal of Henan Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 41(4), 156–159.
- [7] Leane, E. (2004). Romancing the pole: A survey of nineteenth-century Antarctic utopias. *Futures Exchange: ACH*, (23), 151–169.
- [8] Levin, H. (1967). The power of blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville. *Alfred A. Knopf*.
- [9] Liu, L., & Xiang, Y. (2020). The allegorical world of death: A study of Edgar Allan Poe's fiction. *Foreign Language Studies*, (3), 27–32.
- [10] Luo, X. (2006). *Edgar Allan Poe studies from a consumerist perspective*. Jiangsu University Press.
- [11] Philbrick, N. (2003). *Sea of glory: America's voyage of discovery, the U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1838–1842*. Viking.
- [12] Poe, E. A. (1838). *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Harper & Brothers.
- [13] Pruette, L. (1930). A psycho-analytical study of Edgar Allan Poe. *The American Journal of Psychology*, 42(3), 370–402.
- [14] Reynolds, J. N. (1835). *Dedication to the Honourable the Secretary and Officers of the United States Navy*. Harper & Brothers.
- [15] Reynolds, J. N. (1836). *Address on the subject of a surveying and exploration expedition to the Pacific and South Seas*. Harper & Brothers.
- [16] Shao, W. (2018). Interpreting Poe's aesthetic redemption through the theory of the uncanny. *Journal of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies*, (5), 69–73.
- [17] Stackpole, E. A. (1953). *The sea-hunters: The New England whalers during two centuries, 1635–1835*. J. B. Lippincott.
- [18] Stovall, F. (1925). THE WOMEN OF POE'S POEMS AND TALES. *Studies in English*, 5, 197–209.
- [19] Wang, N. (2013). *Ecocriticism*. People's Publishing House.
- [20] Wijkmark, J. (2009). Poe's *Pym* and the discourse of Antarctic exploration. *The Edgar Allan Poe Review*, 10(3), 84–116.
- [21] Woodbridge, R. G. (1984). J. N. Reynolds: Father of American exploration. *The Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 45(2), 110–125.
- [22] Zhang, Z. (2017). The hollow Earth theory, Antarctic exploration, and three modes of imagining America. *Foreign Literature Review*, (2), 80–110.
- [23] Zhu, Z., & Zhang, X. (2010). Edgar Allan Poe's poetry in China. *Foreign Language and Literature*, (6), 23–28.