

Forevermore

A Pat O'Malley Mystery

JIM MUSGRAVE

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DEDICATION

To my wife, Ellen. May our love remain a mysterious joy.

Forevermore

By

Jim Musgrave

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This is the first mystery in a series starring Pat O'Malley, a detective who is born out of the need to prove himself as a sleuth worthy of Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin. I want to thank the Edgar Allan Poe Society for their excellent resource materials and the editing of my wife, Ellen, who has been a mystery lover forever (and more). Finally, I want to acknowledge the works of all those mystery writers who have come before me. I hope I have contributed to the craft with an interesting look at history from a fictional perspective.

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PROLOGUE: THE MURDER

October 3, 1849, Baltimore

Edgar fingered the outline of the Uberti pocket revolver. It was resting in a leather holster strapped diagonally across his chest beneath the black vest and under the black waist coat. As the hunted, he was well aware of the extra thunder he required in order to even the odds against the hunter. Where could his antagonist be? Was he perhaps the tall gentleman sitting in the window seat across the aisle from him? Edgar thought he saw the man glance in his direction several times after they both got on in New York.

It was so much easier writing down the plots of his mysteries. The writer is his own master, and the machinations of both hero and villain are clearly delineated in his mind from the outset. The reality of sleuthing in real time was quite different, however. He was at once aware of the immediate and infinite possibilities surrounding him. It was as if he were tasked with the job of describing every detail in this club car. There were two rows of seats on each side of the aisle, but not all seats were taken. He would need to walk slowly down the aisle to look at each suspect, evaluating his demeanor for telltale signs of nervousness or some tick in his mannerism that might give him away. This person could even be female, which would put into play even more possibilities for hidden weapons.

Instead, Edgar stared out of the window at the passing scenery, keeping his fingers folded over the gun, willing the courage into his being, as if the passage of time in the moment could inoculate him against the evil forces outside his mind. The green farm land rolled past like an emerald ocean. The speed of the powerful steam locomotive made Nature its plaything.

Edgar knew he had the upper-hand because they did not know he was on to them. Yes, the fictitious Detective C. Auguste Dupin would have had the advantage of assembling his evidence at a much slower pace. He would have sipped at his cordial while lounging inside his boudoir, fitting the evidence together as one fits together a

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picture puzzle. The pieces of his urgent puzzle, however, were assembling themselves all around him, and he was not in charge of their arrangement. Instead, it was his job to be the subservient mouse, the obsequious deer, or the meek rabbit. His sole advantage was the element of surprise and the hard lump of insurance under his jacket.

The conductor made his way down the aisle, his pocket watch bobbing up and down on its chain over his portly frame, his black uniform cleanly pressed with brass buttons gleaming under the lights as he shouted, “Bal-ti-more station! All those disembarking, please assemble at the double-doors! Last call for Bal-ti-more!”

Edgar slowly rose from his seat, keeping Dr. Carter’s expensive Malacca cane in his right hand, watching the other passengers carefully to ascertain their demeanor towards him. He had accidentally taken the Richmond, Virginia physician’s cane instead of his own. Edgar’s right upper molar was bothering him again. It throbbed like a hellish demon, but his fear of the dentist had kept him in this insufferable state for three weeks now. He waited until all the others had formed a queue at the doors before he stepped out into the aisle. A woman in an ostrich feathered hat, a man in a bowler, and three youths in knee pants chasing each other around their mother. He moved behind them all as the doors whooshed open and their little crowd stepped down the steps onto the station platform.

The others scattered like chickens in the barnyard, and Edgar just stood there, looking up and down the train depot, watching for approaching danger. The devil winds were licking up eddies of abandoned rubbish, whirling it in haphazard, circular gusts. He could smell the engine exhaust, as it began its combustion process. The loud steam whistle blared out over the wooden platform, and the wheels of the train began to circle, slowly at first, and then with more speed, as the gigantic metal beast made its way out of the station.

Everything he observed took on ominous features as he walked out onto the paved street that led down to the wharf toward the pier where the ships were docked. They would soon be after him, and his entire body was on alert. He again fingered the pistol, and his other hand went up to his cheek to press on the throbbing toothache. He tried to walk as casually as possible down Light Street on the inner harbor. He didn’t know where he was headed; he simply wanted to show himself to the ones he knew were after him. The passing pedestrians nodded to him as he walked, and he nodded back.

He was struck from behind. The tall man in a gray top hat and matching frock coat had raised his arm with a quick motion and then brought the leather sack filled with musket balls down upon Edgar’s head. The other man, a short, stocky gent in a brown bowler, caught the falling victim and immediately wrapped Edgar’s left arm around his own shoulder. The gray man took Edgar’s right arm and wrapped it around his shoulder, and they both began to drag the body down the street toward the docks.

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When they passed inquisitive faces, Gray said, “Poor Bill’s in his cups, again, I’m afraid,” and they continued to drag Edgar down the street. It was now dusk and the gas lights were being lit all along the walk. The horizon in the west was bleeding scarlet and blue as the sun sank behind the hills. The two men came up to a dilapidated shed on the waterfront, and Gray put a key inside the mortise lock, opened the door, and they carried Edgar inside.

* * *

When he came to consciousness, Edgar could smell the odor of alcohol all over his person. As a recently sworn member of the Sons of Temperance, this appearance of inebriety was most unseemly to him. He no longer wore his black frock coat and cravat. Instead, he wore tattered pantaloons that were too short and a long-sleeved white shirt and a black Bombazine alpaca coat that was soiled, ripped at the seams and reeking of robust spirits.

As his blurry vision improved, he looked around. He was downtown in Baltimore, and he was sitting on a bench in front of a tavern. He could hear the loud shouts of the patrons inside and the odor of burning cigars and pipes made his stomach lurch. He felt the top of his head, and it was adorned with a frazzled straw hat, something he would have never worn. Strangely, he still had the cane given to him by Dr. Carter. The blackguards had not taken that. He absent-mindedly twisted the gold hound’s head at the top of the cane and it unscrewed and pulled forth to reveal an eight-inch blade. Dr. Carter’s cane was also a weapon, it seemed, and something he had no use for now. His Italian pistol, of course, had been confiscated, and he had been dropped off in front of this tavern. He turned around to see the name on the building’s façade: Gunner’s Hall.

He could barely stand, and his mind kept playing tricks on him. Was it a fever that seemed to be spreading throughout his body? He grabbed the cane and lurched toward the entrance to the tavern. Perhaps he could get help from someone inside. However, when the swinging doors opened, he saw dozens of men standing about, and they each had the head of a cat! The pointed ears, the large pupils, the needle whiskers sprouting from a furry snout, and they all turned toward him in unison and snarled to reveal their sharp fangs! Was he insane?

Edgar turned around and staggered back out onto the boardwalk. The earth began to spin, out of control, and he sat backward down on the bench. He remembered the story he once wrote about a black cat that was buried inside the wall along with the murder victim. He felt as if he had been buried inside himself, as he could not make sense of his own thoughts as they tried to assemble in his brain. Instead, he lay down on the bench, and his throat constricted like it was inside a noose, and then he screamed, at the top of his lungs, “Reynolds! You bastard! Reynolds!” The darkness closed in upon him, and he passed into a state of delirium, never to fully revive again upon this earth.

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1 I KNEW MISTER POE

1865, Poe's Cottage, Bronx, New York.

I found the cryptic message pasted inside the bed where she died. After several nights of tossing and turning in that same bed, my mind became filled with the nightmarish vision of my benefactor, "The Divine Edgar"; his large head came at me, that wide forehead, those penetrating dark eyes hidden within their cavernous sockets, his accusing lips writhing beneath that famous black mustache, and his visage shouted at me concerning the most foul, immodest and unwholesome behaviors I could have ever imagined a man could profess.

I awoke, thus, with a start, perspiring freely, my bedclothes quite drenched, afear'd beyond mortal reason. Quite unintentionally, I found myself lifting the mattress upon that same bed where, upon a midnight dreary, his beloved Sis had perished from this earth, and I spied the long letter affixed to the headboard. I pried it off, as it was pasted with some sort of glue, carefully preserving its parchment, and brought it to my eyes under the gas light on my bed stand.

I must confess I knew him as he lived and breathed, in this same residence, in which I now reside. His aunt, Mrs. Maria Clemm, having sold this cottage in 1849, following her son-in-law's tragic death in Baltimore, wrote to the owners, the Valentines, allowing me to live here following the war. A union veteran, I served under General William Tecumseh Sherman in his campaigns at Shiloh, Vicksburg, Chattanooga, and Atlanta. I was heartily decorated as a war hero, receiving the highest award, the Congressional Medal of Honor, in a ceremony just before Mister Lincoln was assassinated in April of this year. My honor was for shielding, with my own body, the great general as he stood above the town of Atlanta and watched it burn. I spied a Confederate, in rags, as he took aim at the general from the woods near our regimental tent. Acting quickly, I dove in front of the speeding bullet and took it into my own body, inside my left shoulder blade, and thus I spared the life of my leader. I, like Edgar, served under a pseudonym during my military duties, as I had been paid handsomely by a wealthy business man in New York to serve in his stead. My warrior's name as Staff Sergeant was Stephan Pullman, but my real name is

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Patrick James O'Malley.

However, it was my love of Edgar and his writings that gained me the employment as manuscript messenger to his publisher in New York, as a mere lad of 18. I often came to this same cottage, during the year of 1846, until Virginia's death from consumption, at 24 years of age, on January 30, 1847.

It was the following poem I read on that day in 1865, my mind war-weary and my breast heaving with fright, as the storm clouds poured down their vicious torrents upon my cottage:

*Ever with thee I wish to roam—
Dearest my life is thine.
Give me a cottage for my home
And a rich old cypress vine,
Removed from the world with its sin and care
And the tattling of many tongues.
Love alone shall guide us when we are there —
Love shall heal my weakened lungs;
And Oh, the tranquil hours we'll spend,
Never wishing that others may see!
Perfect ease we'll enjoy, without thinking to lend
Ourselves to the world and its glee —
Ever peaceful and blissful we'll be.*

However, it was the small cypher at the end of this poem that drew my attention. It said, "I shall protect you, Sis, and I shall avenge the poor girl from the tobacco shop, bringing home money so we can live in our rural cottage, away from the trials and tribulations of this wretched age! Signed, Your beloved Eddy."

As an avid reader of Edgar's famous poems and stories, I was also an avid follower of his untimely demise, at the age of 40, allegedly from alcoholic delirium tremens, or what was known then as "*mania-à-potu.*" The story had it that after receiving news by letter from Maria Clemm that his childhood sweetheart, Sarah Elmira Shelton, had accepted his proposal of marriage, Edgar had planned to travel to New York to retrieve Mrs. Clemm, but he had, instead, begun drinking and ended up in Baltimore. He continued his spree of spirit consumption and on October 3, 1849, an election day, he was discovered in a comatose condition at the polling place for Baltimore's Fourth Ward. He supposedly died of delirium tremens at the Washington College Hospital on 7 October.

This case was supposed to be closed, but now, with my new bit of evidence, I was going to attempt to bring truth to light. Edgar would have wanted me to do this, and I believe this was why I was being tormented inside Poe Cottage. Like Edgar, I am also an Irishman, and we Irish have been often scourged with the disease of alcoholism, and it was this malady that brought asunder his brother, Henry, and my own brother, Timothy. I have abstained from John Barleycorn my whole life because

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of my brother's death, and when I read that Mister Poe had joined the Sons of Temperance in Richmond, on August 27, I became curious about whether or not he was indeed under the influence of alcohol in Baltimore. We Irish have been saddled with the ugly image of inebriety from our first appearance on the shores of this great land in the 1820s, and I wanted to prove that Edgar had not succumbed to drink, as they had reported in the press, as I knew him to be a most fine and kindly gentleman during his employ, and it was he that encouraged me to write. I, like his famous detective, C. Auguste Dupin, will not give up until I arrive at the truth of the matter in the mysterious death of Edgar Allan Poe!

The note I found under Poe's bed led me to my first inquiry into this case. Who was this "poor girl from the tobacco shop" to which Edgar referred? Why did she need to be avenged? But first, I wanted to prove that Edgar Allan Poe was not drunk when he was in Baltimore, and for that I needed to talk to the only man who saw the writer during his last days on this earth, one Doctor, and a fellow Irishman, John J. Moran.

* * *

I took the train down to Baltimore, and it was filled with the usual collection of uniformed stiffs awaiting word on payment from the government. They were talking of riot and were quite inebriated, complaining of "damned President Johnson" and "we better get our just desserts." The civilians on the train would listen sympathetically, but I supposed they were as irritated at their drunkenness as I was.

I enquired at the Church Home and Infirmary in Baltimore, which was known in 1849 as Washington University Hospital, as to the whereabouts of Dr. Moran. A kindly Episcopalian woman by the name of Mrs. Drew told me I could find him at the Barnum House, 154 Baltimore Street. I recalled that earlier in the year this hotel was made famous up north for the Rebel raids which took place. In February of 1865, a band of Confederates known as McNeill's Rangers made a daring raid on Cumberland and entered the city undetected and captured General Benjamin Kelley who was asleep in his bed in the hotel. Union General George Crook was also captured at the nearby Revere House.

The hotel was four stories tall, and when I asked at the desk as to which room Dr. Moran might be staying, the attendant seemed bothered by my Yankee attire and voice. I had to repeat to him twice the name, and then he finally began to nod and told me I could find him in Room 218. "Dr. Moran stays inside, mostly," the young man stated, "except when he's seein' the haints."

"Haints?" I asked. "What is this word?"

"The doctor likes his toddy," the clerk said, pantomiming with his hand the action of imbibing from a glass of liquor. "When he drinks he says he can see ghosts. When he sees them, he follows them outside into the streets."

I was expecting the worst when I knocked on the doctor's door, but when he answered, the gentleman was not in his cups, but he did seem rather nervous in his

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demeanor. He was a tall, red-haired man, with spectacles and a wide forehead. He wore a business coat and necktie, and he seemed to me to be a person who would not chase after hauntings of any kind.

Immediately, I told him of my quandary, and that I needed to know if, when he examined Poe in 1849, whether the author was in a drunken state. Sadly, I was not given a direct answer, as the good doctor seemed to have been shaken to the core by my reference to his past. Indeed, I was given a brief recitation of the hard times following the panic of 1837, and how he was discharged from his duties at the hospital in 1851.

“The Fells Point Savings Institution owned our college’s hospital,” he told me, frowning. “The doctors who worked there were experimenting on the bodies sold to them from the nearby mortuary and cemetery in order to make a profit from the bodies for their training and research. Yes, grave-robbers and even kidnappers were known to bring snatched relatives to these nefarious scoundrels who called themselves interns of medicine. As a result, a mob tried to burn the place down in ’53, by God!” Moran yelled, the veins in his neck pulsing with vigor.

“Please, Dr. Moran,” I said, “Could you just tell me what occurred when you admitted Edgar Allan Poe into your residence?” I opened my jotter and took up my pen to make notes.

“I had him placed in a small room in the turret part of the building where patients were put who had been drinking freely. The room can be recognized in the cut by the star. He was clad in a shabby suit, and being unconscious, I had him put in the place indicated, not knowing at that moment the cause of his distress. I now know that he was perfectly sober when he returned to the city.”

Dr. Moran motioned for me to be seated on his rather moth-eaten divan, and I did so. He then continued his report.

“My witnesses are Judge N. Poe, of Baltimore, a second cousin of the poet, and the conductor of the train, Captain George W. Rollins, well-known in Baltimore. The following testimony was given to me by the conductor a few days after the poet’s death:

Meeting him on the street he said, ‘I saw in the papers the death of the gentleman I had on my train the other day.’

I asked, ‘Do you know who he was?’

He said he did not at that time, but he had learned since that it was Edgar Poe. He remarked that he was the finest specimen in appearance of a gentleman that he had lately seen. ‘I was attracted to him from his appearance.’

I said, ‘Captain, how was he dressed?’

He replied, ‘In black clothes; his coat was buttoned up close to his throat. There were two men well-dressed that came aboard of the train from the other side of the river, having come from Philadelphia or New York. They took a seat back of Poe. From their appearance I knew they were sharks or men to be feared, and when I got

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out of the train at Baltimore I saw them following Poe down towards the dock.’

I asked the conductor if Poe was in liquor.

‘Why,’ said he, ‘I would as soon have suspected my own father.’

I then related to him the facts regarding Poe and where he was found the next morning, and the conductor expressed his thorough belief that those two men went through him. A similar statement was given by this conductor to Judge Nielson Poe sometime during the same month, of the year 1849, and was repeated to me by Judge Poe last April two years ago while sitting in the court-room, after the court had been dismissed. We spent more than an hour discussing the poet’s life and death.”

“That sounds like valid information,” I told him.

“And just here let me give you the words of Mrs. Shelton, who yet lives, regarding the style of clothing he had on when he left her in Richmond on the 4th of October. I asked Mrs. Shelton how he was dressed. She replied, ‘In a full suit of black cloth,’ remarking that he always wore black clothing, and was very neat in dress and person.

‘Had he a watch or jewelry on his person?’ She could not say, as he always wore his coat well buttoned up to his throat, covering much of his person.

I said, ‘He told me his contemplated visit to New York was on business and that he expected to return in a few days.’ I related to her the facts of his case, where found, how dressed when brought to the house, and she instantly exclaimed, with tears in her eyes, that he was robbed, as I have always believed, and drugged to accomplish it.

When brought to the hospital, as I have said, he was unconscious. I had him disrobed and made comfortable in bed. I placed an experienced nurse at the door of his room to preserve quiet, to watch over him and to notify me when he showed signs of waking. He was, at that time, in a heavy sleep or stupor.

I left him and on entering my office below, I discovered the hack still standing before the entrance door of the hospital, as you will see in the cut. I asked the driver, ‘What are you waiting for?’

He said, ‘My hire.’

I asked, ‘Who sent you here?’

He replied, ‘You have the ticket,’ meaning the card he had brought with him.

I asked, ‘Where did you find this man?’

‘On Light Street wharf, sir.’

I said, ‘Dead drunk, I suppose?’

He replied, ‘No, sir; he was a sick man, a very sick man, sir.’

‘Why do you think he was not drunk?’ I asked.

‘He did not smell of whiskey,’ said the driver, ‘he is too white in the face. I picked him up in my arms like a baby, sir, and put him in the hack.’

“It would seem he was ill and not with drink,” I pointed out.

“Without further delay I paid the man his fee. Little did I then think that after

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sixteen years I should be called upon to give a full account of Poe's death and to defend the man whom I at that hour believed to be drunk; and that man, the great American genius, whose name is now a household word."

"I am much indebted to you for doing so, Dr. Moran. I wish that I could give you money, but, alas, I am but a lowly veteran," I said. He seemed undeterred, and he continued with renewed vehemence.

"In a few minutes Poe threw the cover from his breast, and looking up asked the nurse, 'Where am I?' The nurse made no reply but rang for me. I attended the call immediately, and placing my chair by the side of the patient's bed, took his left hand in my own and with my right hand pushed back the raven locks of hair that covered his forehead. I asked him how he felt. He said, 'Miserable.'

'Do you suffer much pain?'

'No.'

'Do you feel sick at the stomach?'

'Yes, slightly.'

'Does your head ache, have you pain there?' putting my hand upon his forehead.

'Yes.'

'Mister Poe, how long have you been sick?'

'Can't say.'

'Where have you been stopping?'

'In a hotel on Pratt Street, opposite the depot.'

'Have you a trunk or valise or anything there you would like to have with you?' supposing he had other clothing than that which he brought on his person to the hospital.

He said, 'I have a trunk with my papers and some manuscripts.' Note this; there *was no clothing in the trunk*. A new suit of wedding clothes was to have been placed in it for the *groom*. His visit was a business one and was to be a short one. I offered to send for his trunk. He thanked me and said, 'Do so at once;' remarking, 'Doctor, you are very kind.'

"I sent the porter of the house with an order for his trunk, which was brought in less than an hour.

The sick man said, 'Where am I?'

'You are in the hands of your friends,' I replied, 'and as soon as you are better, I will have you moved to another part of the house, where you can receive them.' He was looking the room over with his large dark eyes, and I feared he would think he was unkindly dealt with, by being put in this prison-like room, with its wired inside windows, and iron grating outside."

"Yes, it sounds much like a prison confine," I admitted.

"I now felt it necessary that I should determine the nature of his disease and make out a correct diagnosis, so as to treat him properly. I did not then know but he

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might have been drinking, and so to determine the matter, I said, ‘Mister Poe, you are extremely weak, pulse very low; I will give you a glass of toddy.’

He opened wide his eyes, and fixed them so steadily upon me, and with such anguish in them that I had to look from him to the wall beyond the bed. He then said, ‘Sir, if I thought its potency would transport me to the Elysian bowers of the undiscovered spirit world, I would not take it.’

‘I will then administer an opiate, to give you sleep and rest,’ I said.

Then he rejoined, ‘Twin sister, spectre to the doomed and crazed mortals of earth and perdition.’

“I was entirely shorn of my strength. Here was a patient supposed to have been drunk, very drunk, and yet refuses to take liquor. The ordinary response is, ‘Yes, Doctor, give me a little to strengthen my nerves.’ I found there was no tremor of his person, no unsteadiness of his nerves, no fidgeting with his hands, and not the slightest odor of liquor upon his breath or person. I saw that my first impression had been a mistaken one. He was in a sinking condition, yet perfectly conscious. I had his body sponged with warm water, to which spirits were added, sinapisms applied to his stomach and feet, cold applications to his head, and then administered a stimulating cordial. I left him to sleep and rest. He slept about one hour. When he awoke, I was again summoned to his bedside. I found his breathing short and oppressed, and that he was much feebler. I saw that his life was in great danger. He asked several questions as to where he was, and how he came there. Remarking, in answer to my question as to where he went after he returned from the *Susquehanna*, he said that he had started for the boat. ‘I remember no more,’ said he, ‘but a vague and horrible dread that I would be killed, that I would be thrown in the dock.’

I said, ‘Mister Poe, you are in a critical condition, and the least excitement of your mind will endanger your life; you must compose yourself and remain quiet.’

“Did he say anything more?” I asked, reflecting upon my notes thus far.

“Only when he was crazed and delirious. He began to yell the name of Reynolds, and he shouted this name in a fevered frenzy for most of the night before he succumbed,” Moran said, taking his spectacles from the bridge of his nose and wiping them with his handkerchief.

“Thank you, kind sir,” I told him, getting up to leave. “You have assisted me greatly in my exploration.” I left the good doctor to his day.

I was now certain that Poe had not been drunk on the day of his transport to the hospital. Why had he been accosted on the train? What was his reason for being in Baltimore in the first place? I thought about this for quite some time down in the hotel’s tavern. I surmised that I needed to see what Poe meant when he said he would “avenge the poor girl from the tobacco shop.” Perhaps this would give me the clue as to his purpose for taking the side-trip to Baltimore, which led to his death. I knew that the great author had written a version of the death of Mary Cecilia Rogers, the poor tobacco shop girl, which caused such a great media stir in 1841. Even

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though he called his version, “The Mystery of Marie Roget,” and it was set in Paris and not New York, I believed that this unsolved murder could possibly connect with Poe’s own demise, and so I wanted to visit a few people in New York to see if I could determine the real reason why Poe was sober in Baltimore in 1849.

As for Dr. Moran’s report that Poe shouted “Reynolds” repeatedly in his delirium, this man was most likely Jeremiah Reynolds, an explorer who, in 1829, sailed to discover the Antarctic. Reynolds wrote about seeing a “Mocha Dick,” a great white whale that destroyed a ship in the South Pacific. This, of course, later became Herman Melville’s model for his “Moby Dick.” Poe, also, used Reynolds’ descriptive journals in his only novel, *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Poe was angry that Reynolds had not been chosen by the government to head the United States’ Antarctic expedition because of Reynolds’ theory that the Earth was hollow. “It is a great pity,” Poe wrote, “that the control of this important enterprise was not given to its originator, Reynolds. He is, in every respect, as thoroughly qualified as Commander Wilkes is not. A more disgraceful—a more unprincipled—a more outrageous system of chicanery, never was put in operation, before the open eyes of an intelligent community, than that by means of which Mister Wilkes was made to occupy the position, and usurp the undeniable rights of Mister Reynolds.” In his state of delirium, Poe was probably thinking back to Reynolds and his injustice and to Poe’s own failure as a novelist.

☐