

# Antarctica and Metaphors

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## Introduction

The vast amounts of literature have been written on about Antarctica ranging from memoirs by explorers past and present, to fantasy and horror fiction, to poetry. These works are rife with metaphorical language that offer some insight into how Antarctica is conceptualised by explorers and writers alike.

## Existential Dread ... on Ice!

There has long been an associate between the polar regions and a kind of existential dread that they can evoke. This applies not just in a philosophical sense but a psychological one too as seen in cases of so-called 'polar madness' that have been observed on polar expeditions, notably the Belgica expedition (1897-1899) which was the first to overwinter in Antarctica.

In the introduction to *Polar Horrors*, John Miller writes that:

*“The Romantic imagination of the poles works through an intriguing mixture of emotions: the dread and the desire ... which together emphasis the dual function of extremity as existential as much as geographical.”*

There is some suggestion in Conceptual Metaphor Theory research that metaphorical language could function to reduce uncertainty. With this in mind, further research could take a systematic look at how polar explorers use metaphors in their writings.



After returning from his journey to Antarctica on the *Belgica* (1897–1899), Dr Frederick Cook (pictured in Fig.1 to the left) published his account of the expedition, *Through the First Antarctic Night* (1900). In his introduction, Cook notes that:

*“Until 1772 the south frigid zone was pictured by fiction writers in flowery phraseology ... To learn the truth of this new “land of promise” Capt. James Cook was sent out [].”*

## Antarctica Poetry

In her poetry collection, *Erebus* (2022), poet Elizabeth Lewis Williams recounts her tracing of her geologist father's 1958 journey from the Peninsula to Mount Erebus through photography and poems. Her writing demonstrates the tendency to personify the environment that appears in writing on Antarctica.

Williams describes *‘the sea’s restlessness’* and the *‘agitation of the waves’*

In her poem, *Antarctic Convergency*, Williams writes: *‘in hushed heaps the brash ice at last, rising and falling on the sea breaths, wave by wave.’*

Later in the poem, the sounds of the environment manifest physically as she writes of the *‘slow spun tendrils of whale song.’*

In a poem titled *The Quest* by Richard Wightman that was read at the Transportation Club in New York on 30 March 1910 at a dinner for Sir Ernest Shackleton. In this poem, despite the narrative focus on the explorer, there are still instances of the environment being personified.

Wightman writes: *‘The ceaseless stare of cold antarctic suns.’*

These are just a handful of examples to demonstrate a wider tendency and future research would benefit from looking at a larger corpus of Antarctic poetry to establish commonalities and novel language use.

## Bibliography

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## Images

- ❖ Fig 1. Dr. Frederick Cook, full-length portrait, standing, facing left, dressed in fur garments and wearing snowshoes photograph by William Hohenstein, Brooklyn, N.Y , License Attribution (CC BY 2.0) (Retrieved from: <https://picryl.com/media/dr-frederick-cook-full-length-portrait-standing-facing-left-dressed-in-fur-e68533>, 1 Dec 2023)
- ❖ Fig 2. (background) NASA Satellite View of Antarctica, License Attribution (CC BY 2.0) (Retrieved from: [flickr.com/photos/24662369@N07/6309214790](https://www.flickr.com/photos/24662369@N07/6309214790), 1 Dec, 2023)