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Ronald C. Harvey

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Ph.D. degree in English

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ABSTRACT

"A Dialogue with Unreason": The Critical History of
Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, 1838-1993

By

Ronald C. Harvey

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to

Michigan State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

English Department

1995

And so it has proven. The complex, winding route Pym has followed from near-oblivion to the central Poe text has been a history of dissensus on almost every level at which critics and scholars read texts; and of dramatic change between critical generations. The unique set of thematic and narrative problems the work poses has eluded so far every hermeneutic structure brought against it, consistently undermining the very reading strategies it seems to invite.

The first comprehensive history of the American reception of Pym, this study addresses every published critical statement that points to

found, as it analyzes the complex response to a peculiarly interesting text. In the process it elaborates the ways in which critics and critical camps have sought to conceptualize the text around their own assumptions. "A Dialogue with Unreason": The Critical History of Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, 1838-1993

Following an introduction establishing the theoretical approach, the study traces, in order: the v. By varied circumstances, and then considers the relative silence of the book for nearly 50 years (chapter two); the p. Ronald C. Harvey's interpretation (chapter three); the formal analysis and the critical reception; and c. Critics and other readers have consistently viewed Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym as a problem. In his only long fiction, Poe confounds expectations seemingly at every turn. He confronts the reader with flagrant morbidity; aggression and terror circulate like blood through a text that nonetheless moves toward a visionary adumbration. Poe speaks to us, as Foucault said of Raymond Roussel, in "a language that comes to us from the depths of a night that is perfectly clear and impossible to dominate."

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Following an introduction establishing the theoretical premises, the study traces, in order: the widely varied contemporary response, and then considers the relative silence of the following one hundred years (chapter two); the psychological analysis and interpretation (chapter three); the formal analysis and interpretation of New Critics and others, including formal conclusions inferred from the reconstructed composition process and sources (chapter four); historicist location of Pym within some cultural or literary tradition, including versions of American historiography and international Romanticism (chapter five); and the modernist and poststructural readings of Pym, which find in the narrative's rich self-referentiality meaningful metaliterary critiques of the representational capacity of language and the determination of the subject (chapter six).

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RONALD C. HARVEY

1995

I would like to express thank the members of my Committee, and especially to Michael Lopez for his assistance and patience, during this process and throughout my program. I am also grateful to Lorraine Hart. I cannot imagine I would have navigated through all of this as a successful conclusion without her assistance on countless occasions. Her generous spirit is one of best things about Michigan State.

Support has come from other sources as well. I thank David Stinson, Tebo, Dan Reed, Julie Humphrey, and Gloria and I. These people are all faithful sources of personal support and inspiration. I am enriched for my association with each of these true friends.

For his intelligent perceptions and observations over many hours of conversation on this material, but more importantly for his friendship, I owe a special debt of gratitude to David Stinson.

Finally, for their upright example, their unflinching confidence and their unconditional love, I thank my parents, Ruth and Paul Harvey, to whom this dissertation is dedicated.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Chapter One "An Independent and Ingenious Fiction":

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In attempting my own interpretation of Poe's single booklength narrative, I encountered a remarkable critical history, one which has changed dramatically with the critical generations, and one which can be characterized as dissensus on nearly every level at which critics and scholars read texts. Satisfying answers to questions of the work's meaning and its merit seem perpetually to recede ahead of us, as the most basic questions about the text and its composition remain open:

Chapter One

"An Impudent and Ingenious Fiction": Introduction

1

Aims

In much of his work Michel Foucault reveals a fascination for artists of a certain kind: Holderlin, Nietzsche, Raymond Roussel and others. In their art they have kept alive throughout the reign of reason in the Western world what, as he says, was restored to science only in the twentieth century by Freud, "the possibility of a dialogue with unreason" (Madness 198). Theirs is a language which, as he said of Roussel's, "comes to us from the depths of a night that is perfectly clear and impossible to dominate" (qtd. in Racevskis 49). If one were to choose an American book which comes to us from such an ulterior region, and has itself proven more than any other to be "impossible to dominate," that work could well be Poe's Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym.

In attempting my own interpretation of Poe's single booklength narrative, I encountered a remarkable critical history, one which has changed dramatically with the critical generations, and one which can be characterized as dissensus on nearly every level at which critics and scholars read texts. Satisfying answers to questions of the work's meaning and its merit seem perpetually to recede ahead of us, as the most basic questions about the text and its composition remain open:

the genre of the work, the seriousness or levity of the author's intent, its stature as a work of genius, hackwork, or something in between, and even its state of completion. Yet it is the question of the meaning or supposed message implicit in the text, regarded, if one is perceived at all, as variously apocalyptic, nihilistic, mysterious, confused, radical, or nonsensical, to name a few, that provides the most interesting and potentially fruitful set of issues. Poe scholars and literary historians who turn to Pym in the context of contemporary theory, as they are doing in ever increasing numbers, encounter not a unified, progressive history of criticism, but a uniquely complex and rich body of commentary, varying widely in quality, emphasis and assessment. It seemed, therefore, that as the intensity of the attention is making Pym, for the moment, the most important text in the Poe canon, and one of the most important for the study of nineteenth-century literature, a comprehensive history of the response to the work to the present would prove useful. At least it would illuminate the development of the response through past and current critical and scholarly contexts; hopefully, in the end it will illuminate Pym itself. This study, then, brings to bear every published discussion of Pym I could locate, from its initial publication in 1838 onward, toward the aim of a survey and examination of how the book has been received. It will bring into relation the critical issues, priorities, and conclusions of successive generations, analyzing diachronically the evolutions as they have unfolded over a century and a half; but it will also compare the critical and scholarly statements within individual important "statements" are, for example, the loud silence on Poe in

generations, in the process scrutinizing assumptions of consensus, continuity, and steady growth from ignorance to truth structurally implicit in many critical histories of American writers. A secondary aim will be to place Pym within the larger contexts of Poe studies and studies of American literary historiography in general. Indeed, this focus is inevitable, for a significant proportion of Pym commentators themselves have been doing one or the other.

American critical response will also be compared at various historical moments to several other categories of respondents: the French, whose early and sustained enthusiasm for Poe included Pym from the beginning, and who have periodically generated original readings that have proved seminal in Americans' perceptions; and secondly, the American public response, which has been more consistently positive than the critics': from the second edition in 1856 on, it has never been out of print. While it has never rivalled his better-known stories and poems in popularity, nonetheless there has been almost always a variety of available editions, including widely accessible cheaply printed versions. ~~that is of interest:~~

The objects of scrutiny in this study will be reviews, studies and essays devoted exclusively to Pym, essays and books concerned with Poe's work or life in general that offer some sort of reading of Pym (or, in some cases, imply a reading of Pym), and works on American literature that respond to Pym. Moreover it must include many that ignore or briefly dismiss the book or its author; for a book on Poe's writing, for instance, that says little or nothing of his longest and probably most complex work obviously constitutes a response, and some of the most important "statements" are, for example, the loud silence on Poe in

F. O. Matthiessen's influential American Renaissance, and on Pym in the current standard biography by Arthur Hobson Quinn. At present, Pym bibliography is hardly past the pioneer stage. As a bibliographical treatise, this study identifies numerous articles and book chapters on Pym that have escaped notice in the small, fragmentary bibliographic literature extant.¹ It discusses and relates studies far more extensively than these initial bibliographical essays do or were intended to do. Pym must solve some puzzles: reading Augustus's cryptic note in the whaler's dark house, deciphering the strange language and behavior of treacherous Taslatiens, solving the mystery of himself and Peters, and deciphering the petroglyphs.² The Text: Formal and Thematic Problems The response to Pym, in its extremity and variety, seems to suggest a category of literature Carl Jung denominated "the Visionary Mode," into which he placed, for example, Blake's poetry and Joyce's Ulysses. It is the reaction such literature generates, rather than the category itself, that is of interest.

But we are astonished, taken aback, confused, put on our guard or even disgusted--and we demand commentaries and explanations. We are reminded of nothing in everyday life, but rather of dreams, night-time fears and the dark recesses of the mind, that we sometimes sense with misgiving. The reading public as a whole for the most part repudiates this kind of writing, and literary critics are embarrassed by it. (210)

Jung's list could be a gloss of the American scholarly reaction to Pym,

though "repudiate" no longer applies. Frustration and uncertainty are evident, as critics have attempted to contain a work that has remained resistant. ~~are find numerous other genres, including nonfictional forms,~~

The diverse reactions must be considered first as the natural and result of unusually complex and eccentric subject matter. Of course Pym offers numerous riddles of the sort that Poe would later establish as conventions of the detective story plot in the more famous stories of Dupin and Legrand. Pym must solve such puzzles as reading Augustus's cryptic note in the whaler's dark hold, decoding the strange language and behavior of treacherous Tsalalians in time to save himself and Peters, and deciphering the petroglyphs carved into the hill (though he fails in nearly every such task he undertakes); and the story as a whole takes the shape of a mystery, as the reader speculates along with the "author" of the appended "Note" upon the whereabouts and the contents of the concluding portion of the narrative, the means of Pym's escape from the cataract, the undisclosed "matter relative to the Pole itself," and the meaning of those petroglyphs, which vaguely offer themselves as somehow the key to great mysteries. ~~drawing attention to the~~

But it is not merely a mystery or detective story, and there are problems of less obvious intentionality almost too numerous to catalogue that confront critics and other readers. A few examples illustrating the range and character can be offered here. In the category of genre, the work variously presents itself as (and critics have pronounced it as) a work of juvenilia, a fictionalized but verisimilar travel ~~adventure~~ narrative (e.g., Robinson Crusoe), a fantastic or imaginary voyage (e.g., Gulliver's Travels), a profound oneiric or psychological drama, a

bildungsroman, a parody of all these, a satire in the forms of allegory and of anatomy, a hoax, and even an apocalyptic or prophetic writing. And scholars find numerous other genres, including nonfictional forms, embedded in the narrative. Yet the text violates the conventional and functional boundaries of every genre of which it seems to be an example.

Related to the indeterminacy of genre is a group of problems that stem from the instability of the narrative itself, including the narrative frame, structure, and subject. In most studies that address the frame, one finds either implicit assumptions or explicit argument made about the significance of the relationship between the two chief narrators, Pym himself, and the "Mr. Poe," author of the first three and one half chapters. Ostensibly, the preface, "by" Pym, stands as an explanation for the first chapters' prior appearance in two issues of the Southern Literary Messenger the previous year, 1837, under the name of "Poe." (This, of course, was true: Poe had published installments in the January and February numbers while Assistant Editor there.) But rather than ignore this potential confusion, or handle it in some inconspicuous way, Poe exploits it, drawing attention to the relationship by accumulating layer upon layer of irony. Pym tells us he was reluctant to tell his true story, certain that the "positively marvellous" incidents will be taken as "impudent... fiction."² We are told that "Mr. Poe" believed the story when Pym first related it to him, yet admits to having written the first part of the story under his own name, in his own words, and under the label of fiction. Ironically, as Pym tells us, readers responded with credulity, precisely as predicted by "Mr. Poe," who presents this as evidence that Pym may

"trust to the shrewdness and common sense of the public" to believe his story (actually, to trust in the public's dullness, for it takes as truth the chapters explicitly presented as fiction). Pym is thus persuaded that despite his "uncouth" style, "the facts... [will] carry with them sufficient evidence of their own authenticity."

In yet another ironic twist, we learn in the appended "Note" from a third narrator, presumably another editor, that "Mr. Poe" will not cooperate in supplying the missing information of the abortive narrative, because he has changed his mind, and does not believe in the "entire truth" of the later chapters. Thus we apparently have from the real author an oblique, half-confession to his readers--after they have read it--that the narrative is imaginary, and that he has hoaxed them. In a final layer of irony, both the elaborate ruse and the confession prove supererogatory, since both the convoluted preface and the fantastic narrative are incredible on their face, just as Pym had feared. Indeed, despite long-lived rumors, there is no evidence that a significant number of critics or other readers took it as a true account (Pollin Imaginary xv). Confusing rather than clarifying narrative authority, the frame has been the subject of much discussion.

The narrative structure itself is problematic in a number of ways, of which the most troubling--and for many readers annoying--must be the sudden stop, in a narrative that is either atypically concluded or simply unfinished. However one reads the ending, it is certainly mysterious, with respect to the events between the final journal entry of March 22, 1830 on one hand and the writing of the Note and publication of the narrative, in July, 1838, on the other. There are

some half-dozen oblique references to these eight and one half years, and to a promised "subsequent portion of this narrative" which never appears. We know that Pym spent these years on an extended Pacific Ocean voyage on a vessel (never named), and that they were "crowded with events" of the most "unconceivable character" (10.1). We know also that Pym dies suddenly, and that the remaining "two or three" chapters, which had not yet been put to type, had been lost with him.

What we do not know, then, is his means of escape from nearly certain death at the South Pole, as his canoe slips into the chasm; the details of his Pacific voyage (except that he visits the Galapagos Islands at some point, and there kills a tortoise with a four foot long neck); and the circumstances of his "sudden and distressing death" in 1837 or 1838. Perhaps most disappointing, we never learn the identity of the white shrouded figure. This is to say, we never discover the great truth, scientific or apocalyptic, toward which the narrative moves as in a crescendo: "one of the most intensely exciting secrets which has ever engrossed" the "eye of science" (17.12).

A subject of even greater debate on narrative structure has been its continuity or disjunctiveness. In a process seemingly unlike that of any other text, even in the Poe canon, the narrative moves gradually from its own strict rules of verisimilitude to a license for the and bizarre and fantastic, introducing into the familiar world an alien geography with unique features and physical principles, and alien human and animal forms. Readers have described the effect as confusing. Some commentaries suggest the experience of disorientation or even vertigo, as we move through different kinds of discourse, compelled to employ in

within one text a variety of interpretive strategies we would normally use to relate to profoundly different kinds of texts (imaginary and factual, fantastic and verisimilar.)

A more specific focus of debate on structure has been the issue of the apparent discontinuity between the phases of Pym's journey. Critics have pointed out in different ways that the narrative (or Pym himself) has no memory. When an episode is complete, or before it is, the narrative moves on, with little effort at accounting for loose ends or at making transitions. For example, the agonizing death of Pym's dearest friend before his own eyes has no lingering emotional effect, and from the point of his death on, it is as if neither he nor their relationship ever existed. Meanwhile the dog Tiger simply vanishes. On the other hand, W. H. Auden asserted that "each [adventure] leads credibly into the next," and called Pym "an object lesson in the art" of the adventure story (Carlson *Recognition* 222).

Many problems cluster about the narrative subject, Pym himself, as traveller and main narrator. Conventionally in the novel, the relatively stable, unified identity of the narrator is the chief centripetal force in the narrative process, which is constantly threatened with disintegration by the dispersive forces created by its own movement through time, space or both. As unfamiliar encounters and events multiply, pressure increases in proportion on the narrator and/or hero to assimilate the phenomena within a recognizable point of view; nonetheless we presume upon his ability to do so, and that his identity will remain stable, and his consciousness unified.

However nothing is stable about Arthur Gordon Pym. Wild swings in

point of view represent him at one point as an innocent adolescent stowing away for a lark, and a scientifically educated adult, expert in the history of exploration and South Sea natural history. In chapter two Pym delights in such childish pranks as disguising himself as a stranger to his grandfather; within six months he possesses the personal authority to persuade Captain Guy against his better judgment to change the ship's itinerary and steer for the pole (17.12).

Critics have frequently noticed that Pym has little sense of self as the novel opens, in contrast for instance to Dickens's Pip, Oliver, or David Copperfield, who though children innately possess a full range of the best values of their society. Stranger yet, as some critics point out, he never does develop a sense of self. Several of the myth- and psychoanalytic readings even argue for a gradual diffusion of Pym's ego, as Pym journeys back to either primordial being or the womb itself. In any case, his character is peculiarly passive, in a form of literature more or less predicated upon action, and oblivious and static in one in which psychological development is usually the central dynamic. Conspicuously absent is any interpretation by Pym during or after his travels of his own experiences--the ghastly mortification on the wrecked Grampus, the peculiar culture of the Tsalalians, the bizarre natural phenomena. Often he describes these with the casualness of a personality so empty or undeveloped as to be void of expectations, and thus incapable of surprise. This absence, together with Poe's refusal to otherwise supply moral, anthropological, philosophical or even geographical interpretation makes for one of the most completely indeterminate texts in American literature.

The rhetorical and stylistic irregularities have been a bottomless source of interpretive problems. The most obvious is a persistently overwrought language. Bloom might well have chosen Pym as his example in dismissing the style of Poe's stories, which occasionally attain "a badness not to be believed" (Tales 1). While in the Grampus hold, for instance, Pym undergoes a range of emotions occasioned by unexpected events--despair at not hearing from Augustus, terror at being attacked by a beast, relief that it turns out to be the dog Tiger, etc. Each is described in hyperbolic language that seems at once to be ludicrous and to flaunt its own inadequacy to represent primal emotional experience: "I felt, I am sure, more than ten thousand times the agonies of death itself"; "and 'blood' too, that word of words...how chillily...did its vague syllables [sic] fall...into the innermost recesses of my soul!" (3.5, 3.9).

But in the area of rhetoric, a much richer source of discussion has been the polyglot of discursive voices, for the extravagant language is only one of many juxtaposed voices. The language of juvenile adventure literature, for instance, in the boy-and-his-dog and stowaway subplots, rendered from a child's point of view, is followed by distinctly unchildish graphic representations of the mutineers' butchery, and the mortification, putrefaction and cannibalism in the scenes on the floating wreck. Transposed against extravagant, extended descriptions of irrational states of mind--terror, delirium, etc.--which are ubiquitous, is a contrastingly sober scientific reportorial voice. Especially the middle and final portions contain detailed exposition in such fields as geography, the history of exploration, and several areas

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of natural history. Here again we find excess, in the form of a multiplication of detail, producing for example four pages of data on a bird rookery on Kerguelen's Island. For many readers this contributes nothing but bulk and tedium, especially for the contemporary reviewers, who tended to see the book as an adventure story. On the other hand, recent readings are asserting significance to these digressions of the sort that has long been recognized for instance in those of Moby-Dick. Dana Nelson, for example, has identified an elaborate allegorical critique of colonialism in Pym's discussion of species' interactivity within the rookery. Yet another rhetorical transition is the rapid, unmarked intrusion of fantasy into the "nonfiction" discourse. Poe insinuates imaginary elements into the discussions of actual islands, past voyages, life forms, and peoples, in a flagrant disregard of the boundaries between fact and fantasy. There is a corresponding rhetorical shift, in a diminished concern for detail, reportage and credibility. We see Pym casually accept and report wildly impossible phenomena and events--the natives' black teeth, and marbled ocean water, while abandoning his quasi-scientific reportorial style. Not only does a preposterously large (15') bear appear from among the icebergs, but we also are asked to imagine Peters singlehandedly killing it with a knife. Such a scene can be visualized only in a fantastic (in this case, a caricatured) scene, as indeed Peters himself must be, with his dog-fur wig, "indented" skull, ear-to-ear lips, and "exceedingly long and protruding" teeth. To round out this partial list of rhetorical voices, we might mention the prophetic language dominating the final scenes, taking place

in the fantastic geography of the milky ocean, vaporous cataract, and polar chasm. In a reverent style echoing the Book of Daniel and The Revelation, Poe evokes a sense of divine portent, culminating in the final sentence: "There arose in our pathway 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." As Ridgely describes it, the South Pole as an object of "scientific quest," reflected in the geographical-historical discourse, becomes intertwined with the image of the pole in the rhetoric of prophesy, "as symbol of some ultimate revelation of man's history and his fate" ("End" 107).

There are other sources of interpretive problems, such as the function of the various cryptograms which never shed much light on anything, the multitude of textual errors and discrepancies in the plot, etc., all of which have fueled debate on the intention and care Poe invested in the novel.

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The Criticism: Dynamics and Dimensions

Turning to the complex, dynamic critical reaction Pym has generated, at least two effects can be observed more or less consistently over the hundred and fifty years since it appeared. The most striking is the peculiar resistance to criticism Pym has demonstrated from the beginning. The effect has been, first and foremost, the

foremost, a reluctance among many critics to speak conclusively or substantively about it. This has been particularly true of biographers and other commentators who may have found themselves obligated to say something about Pym. We find that many have maneuvered to avoid the questions involving the deepest levels of meaning in the work. They have most frequently ignored it, even in Poe biography or studies of his work, but also in studies of American literary history, the American Romance or novel, the American Renaissance, and other subjects to which it would seem relevant on some ground. If not ignored entirely, it is often briefly dismissed as experimental, trivial, or anomalous, or it is discarded in the same breath with The Journal of Julius Rodman as unfinished work. Such commentators may limit their discussion to the most rudimentary, generic commentary, often little more than a brief description of structure, a plot summary, or a recital of the few known composition and publication facts.

Other forms of evasion are to gingerly write around it, effectively hedging bets about whether, as John Carlos Rowe put it, Pym is "a daunting monumental bungle or a work of transcendent genius" (92). F. O. Matthiessen, for instance, calls Pym "merely the last word in adolescent fantasy," and later in the same paragraph places it "on a kindred level" with no less than The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Moby-Dick ("Poe" 329). This remark, vague as it is, renders incomprehensible the omission of Pym in his American Renaissance, where it is not even mentioned. A. H. Quinn too is ambiguous. In one of the few sentences that might be construed as interpretive, he is both portentous and vague: "When the details of the voyages have long been forgotten, the

picture of the mysterious figure remains, stimulating the imagination of those readers who do not have to have everything explained to them in words of one syllable" (266). In a book subtitled A Critical Biography, one would like to hear Quinn's explanation, even in multisyllabic words if necessary, but none is offered.

This form of criticism often reflects rather than interprets the ambiguity of the text itself. Julian Symons and Daniel Hoffman, for instance, are thoroughly ambivalent. Symons scoffs at Harold Beaver's description of Pym as a symbolistic spiritual odyssey, by downgrading Poe's intention: "There is every indication that Poe began with the idea of telling an adventure story, and that his love of puzzles, jokes, tricks, took over near the end" (218). But later Symons himself offers an apocalyptic reading that even outshines Beaver's: the "shrouded human figure" is "the symbol of a new and pure world. It is a vision, one might say, of the eventual state foreseen in Eureka, when man has become the Godhead" (219). In perhaps the archetypal case of inconclusive criticism, Daniel Hoffman, in a book otherwise containing many original insights into Poe's work, refracts into his own reading of Pym nearly every extant interpretation. He variously claims for it status as: an apocalypse, with its nihilistic conclusion a "simulacrum of the apocalyptic end of man"; a hoax, in which annihilation is followed by rebirth, in the form of Pym's return; a Jungian-organized drama of archetypal projection; a Freudian reading of regression to a womb-like environment and infantile personality (previously proposed by French critics); and an allegory of the South and racism (264-77).

A second consistently perceptible phenomenon of the critical

literature is diversity in approach and method, and dissensus in conclusion. In the nautical language of Frederick Frank, in his introductory remarks to his 1980 bibliography, "Pym's polarized Gothic has now pulled a generation of Poe explorers into its elusive vortex; and like Melville's white whale, Pym has been relentlessly pursued by... a flotilla of specialists who have followed Pym into the warm, white abyss" (117). In his excellent essay, Douglas Robinson succinctly illustrates the range of critical possibilities in a novel with "something for every critical taste," preferring imagery that hints of a clothing store: Pym has

knotty textual problems for the text critic, rich parental and sexual imagery for the Freudian, bold archetypal patterns for the myth critic, the terror of encroaching disorder for the existentialist, microsocieties in violent upheaval for the Marxist, convoluted metafictional ironies for the deconstructionist, and a powerful thrust toward transcendence for the visionary. ("Reading" 47)

Related to the variety of approaches is the critical dissensus, and at times disorder, that characterizes the response to Pym, perhaps an extension of the same discord which has continued to revitalize the genus of Poe criticism from the beginning. In fact probably no American work has engendered disagreement at so many levels of critical and scholarly concern--beginning with the question in the nineteenth century of whether the work merits comment or even mention in any discussion of Poe. What is immediately striking in this regard is the extremity of readings that have been offered, some of them nothing less than

eccentric. For example, notice the range indicated in a few of the opinions about the vague "human" figure Pym encounters at the pole: for Edward Davidson, Pym travels back to the primordial universe; the figure is "the center" of "that whiteness...beyond first things," simultaneously "ultimate reduction" and "ultimate illumination" (175-6). For John Irvin, the white figure is Pym's own unrecognized shadow, cipher of himself. For Walter Bezanson, it is the archetypal mother, to which he has arrived "through a warm cosmic milk bath" (174). For Tod Lieber, it is the image of Pym's own imagination, which he embraces instead of reality, and which saves him from destruction by its "creative power" (188). For Harry Levin, it is an angel, by whose supernatural agency he is saved. For Charles O'Donnell it is an illusion, for Pym has actually moved into the realm of ether, and for Richard Kopley, the white figure is the figurehead of the whaler Penguin which he had encountered on his Ariel excursion, and which again saves his life.

Part of the problem critics have had even speaking the same language about this text is the lack of what Douglas Robinson calls "textual facts" (47). More than established scholarly facts (themselves in short supply with Pym), textual facts refers to a consensus built up over time about the meaning of certain basic features of a text. Such a consensus establishes the boundaries within which debate occurs, and serves as a built-in defense against 'extreme' readings. The lack of textual facts about Pym has made for a disorderly discussion, or more precisely, numerous subordinate discussions in discrete critical languages.

With respect to the disqualification of Pym, it is natural to expect less to be said than by those who champion it. Why write much about, or even read, a work of little merit? We have mentioned some of the ways in which Pym has been dismissed; of derogatory critics of Poe who do not even mention Pym we can infer either unfamiliarity with the text, or, in some cases, rejection as severe as any that is explicit. In many cases, we find that their grievances against Poe or his work apply as much or more to Pym than to the examples they discuss. For example, Eliot writes that he found in Poe "slipshod writing, puerile thinking unsupported by wide reading or profound scholarship, haphazard experiments in various types of writing, chiefly under pressure of financial need, without perfection in any detail." He is writing about Poe's work in general, and makes only the briefest mention of Pym (as a probable influence on H.G. Wells), yet he has articulated each of the chief categories critics have used to condemn Pym (205).

Whitman offers a damning moral critique of Poe, based on the tendency of his poetry toward "morbidity, abnormal beauty," and "the lush and the weird," qualities he would almost certainly find in abundance in Pym (75). Yeats' analysis of "The Pit and the Pendulum" disclosed nothing but "an appeal to the nerves by tawdry physical affrightments" (77). One can imagine a similar indictment of Pym. Winters makes no exceptions to his condemnation of Poe's work as emotionally "obscure." Pym might have a place beside the several mentioned tales such as "The Black Cat" as "studies in hysteria" (195). As creations of "emotion for its own sake," they fail to meet the first test of Winter's didactic aesthetic: They "can be of no aid to us in

understanding ourselves or in ordering our lives, for most of our experience is irrelevant to it" (195, 185).

On the other hand, many of those enthusiastic about Poe have been strongly drawn to Pym, and have had much to say about it. A number have granted it a prominent place in theories of American literature and historiography, calling it a key formal influence or imbuing it with archetypal status. Some regard it as Poe's greatest achievement, while more have come to see it as an integral part of the Poe canon, and, despite its unusual length, of the short fiction. Many of the themes he experimented with in Pym would be exploited in later short stories: death and dying, confinement and entombment, perversity, cryptography, madness, criminality, human contact with the abyss. One might go so far as to suggest that Pym is a kind of ur-text of the canon of Poe's short fiction, though no critic has developed an analysis of the relationship between the two.

Among those critics who praise Pym there is as striking a lack of consensus as among those who denigrate it. Approbation involves widely variant aesthetic criteria and theoretical assumptions behind them. Critics who have praised Pym for its craft tend to see the anomalous structural and stylistic features as meaningful experimentation. Charles Baudelaire and Gaston Bachelard in France, and Walter Bezanson in America were the first of many, for instance, to observe the original narrative techniques Poe devised in rendering Pym's dreams. Paul John Eakin, Stephen Donadio, Stephen Mainville, John Irwin, and others define innovative narrative and structural strategies, while Richard Harp, John Hussey, and M. L. Rosenthal offer analyses of Pym's craft that

emphasize style as a strength, and suggest that Poe's experimentation prefigured modernist aesthetics. Malcolm Cowley called the final paragraph the finest single passage in Poe's prose, while Allen Tate singled out Pym when he remarked that certain passages attain "a lucidity and intensity" unsurpassed even by Swift ("Angelic" 39). Had he cited an example, perhaps it would have been that remarkable description of Pym's dream in the hold of the Grampus, from which we take a fragment: several novelists who have felt awed by "complete" Pym in fiction... Immensely tall trunks of trees, gray and leafless, rose up (1895), in endless succession as far as the eye could reach. Their roots were concealed in wide-spreading morasses, whose dreary water lay intensely black, still, and altogether terrible, beneath. And the strange trees seemed endowed with a human vitality, and, waving to and fro their skeleton arms, were crying to the silent waters for mercy, in the shrill and piercing accents of the most acute agony and despair... (2.12) 82). As David Ketterer has discovered ("Shadows"), Literary artists have been among the first and the most enthusiastic in attributing aesthetic merit to Pym. They come from every period and represent every type. Unconstrained by the pressure of literary convention felt by many professional critics and scholars, they seem unintimidated by a work they cannot dominate by analysis or interpretive ingenuity. Implicitly disdainful of theoretical analysis, the statements of W. H. Auden, Charles Swinburne and others reflect a less questioning fascination for an engaging and original story. Others have been awed by its imaginative sweep and power: Charles Baudelaire,

most influentially, but also Vachel Lindsay, Henry James, Daniel Hoffman, Richard Wilbur, and others. Writers as diverse as Melville, H. P. Lovecraft, and, as T. S. Eliot suggests, Rider Haggard and H. G. Wells were inspired to borrow from or imitate Pym. Increasing discussion about Poe's influence on Melville has included considerable discussion establishing Pym's influence on Moby-Dick, Mardi, Pierre, and Omoo (See chapter five, note 2 below). In "Poe's Endless Voyage," Jules Zanger discusses several novelists who have felt moved to "complete" Pym in fiction of their own: Jules Verne in The Sphinx of the Icefields (1895), a pseudo-scientific rendering; Charles Romyn Dake in A Strange Discovery (1897), a hoax presented as Dirk Peters' account, involving pseudo-historical "lost races" beyond Tsalal; and H. P. Lovecraft in At the Mountains of Madness (1931), a fantasy tying to Lovecraft's own Cthulhu Mythos. Similarly, Hanjo Berressem analyzes Thomas Pynchon's appropriation of Pym materials for V. (1963) in his "Godolphin, Goodolphin, Goodol'phin, Goodol'Pyn, Good ol'Pym: A Question of Integration" (1982). As David Ketterer has discovered ("Shadows"), recent Pym influence study has concentrated on the Anglo-American postmodern fiction and the Latin American Modernisme (e.g., John Barth, Jorge Luis Borges, Julio Cortazar, Carlos Fuentes), while Roberto Cagliero has uncovered a wide influence on Italian literature.

stable concept, he preferred to speak of how the aesthetic functions, within the individual, between individuals, and within a culture. Until

Theoretical Premises

Both the justification and the methodology for this critical history is rooted in the theory of reception aesthetics. Appropriated widely across the theoretical spectrum, including Marxist, psychoanalytic, linguistic and semiotic critical theory, the aesthetics of reception was first discriminated from formalist aesthetic theory in the work of Hans Robert Jauss and Jan Mukarovsky, in their respective departures from the Russian Formalist school.³ Both men sought an aesthetic that takes into account the social and historical function of literature--and concluded that these are its only functions. For Jauss, traditional formalist criticism is founded on an aesthetic of representation. The text represents some object in history, but is itself a discrete object, unchanged by changing perceptions of it. Criteria for artistic judgment are applied to the text, on the assumption that aesthetic value resides objectively and statically in the literary object. Jauss postulated that the determinants of the reception of a text, most importantly the value it is assigned, are located in the reading subject, unfolding from the dialectic between what the reader expects to find--the horizon of expectation--and what he believes he does find. There is no value extrinsic to the reading subject, whether that is an individual, a society, or a generation of readers. Without extrinsic value, a text's value can be only relative and variable, for aesthetic values are themselves unstable.

In his early work in the 1930's, Mukarovsky went a step beyond this in relativizing values. Refusing the notion of aesthetic value as a

stable concept, he preferred to speak of how the aesthetic functions, ~~the~~ within the individual, between individuals, and within a culture. Until the arrival of Foucault and post-Althusserian Marxists, no one had so thoroughly inverted Kant's transcendent aesthetic realm, untouched and untouchable by history. Aesthetic value, as he says, is not only part of the social process, but reaches throughout society, and any object may for a time bear aesthetic value, or function aesthetically. His ~~and~~ basic principle, in fact, is that there is no fixed boundary between aesthetic and extra-aesthetic value. As he puts it, "There are no ~~is a~~ objects which, by virtue of their essence or organization would, ~~can have~~ regardless of time, place or person evaluating them, possess an ~~that~~ aesthetic function and others which, again by their very nature, would be necessarily immune to the aesthetic function" (1-2).

Clearly he is not holding that there is no aesthetic experience distinguishable from practical experience. On the contrary, an object functions more or less aesthetically in inverse relation to the degree of its extraaesthetic utility: a painting, a piece of pottery or a political speech has some balance or imbalance at the moment it appears; and that balance certainly can shift over time, for a variety of ~~ones of~~ reasons. Once their usefulness is outlived, for instance, a speech or pot might be regarded in a more purely aesthetic light. As an example, one might recall the fortunes of two very different nineteenth century American texts, a sentimental narrative poem, let's say, by Longfellow, and a slave narrative, such as those by Frederick Douglass. Until ~~ndly~~ several decades ago the former was held to have relatively pure and more or less permanent aesthetic value, while the latter relatively low in

that regard; or, if it was supposed to possess any, it was shared by the practical cause of abolition, initially, and historical study in subsequent generations. In recent years they have precisely reversed their positions. Such a recognition of the nature of the relative and fluid function of the aesthetic may place in a more comprehensible frame the history of Pym, which has been even less stable in the ways it has functioned aesthetically and extraaesthetically, both diachronically and contemporaneously. It is as important for us as it was central to Mukarovsky to unburden ourselves of the Kantian notion that there is a transhistorical truth about the aesthetic merit of Pym that critics have found, missed, or advanced toward; and the Aristotelian notion that their and our responses derive objectively from the text itself, solely or primarily, asserting that literature has the capacity to create new aesth

Jauss has shed considerable light on determinants which also condition interpretation. For the central paradigm in his early work, Jauss applies to the reading process Karl Popper's axiom of scientific methodology: "All observation is conditioned by the horizon of expectations of the [reading] subject" (qtd. in Jauss, "Literary" 180). Popper postulated that it is through the failure of our expectations that we "make contact" with reality, and so potentially advance knowledge by negative means. Jauss appropriates the horizon concept as a paradigm for what conditions a reading. Thus for Jauss, study of the social praxis, for it conditions the reader's horizon, must accompany study of the literary text. Literary history for Jauss was profoundly dialectic, and he recognized that the very social matrix shaping the reader's horizon, and the horizon itself, is constituted by previous

history, including and especially the socially formed horizon of reading. The way in which a reader might experience a book about an aesthetic values and norms. Jauss has created a social history of the imaginary voyage to the South Pole, for instance, will be profoundly influenced by what he or she already knows about the Pole, by what he knows about an imminent actual expedition, and by other imaginary and real voyages already read. These and many other factors form the reader's horizon of expectations when he or she picks up the book.

But what concerned Jauss more than the social impact on the reception of a text was impact in the other direction. At the same time his horizon shapes his reading, the book will more or less alter his horizon, affecting his expectation and interpretation when he, for example, reads about the real expedition, when he picks up another imaginary narrative or novel, and so forth. Jauss takes Popper's axiom a step further, asserting that literature has the capacity to create new aesthetic, moral, and other kinds of perceptions, which in turn materially shape social history, as in the creation of a new literary form or aesthetic, or the destruction of an old one ("Literary," esp. 180-83). History, from this perspective, is an endlessly dialectic complex of verbal discourse or written texts shaped by extant texts and shaping those yet to come. Subtracting the difference of terminologies, Jauss was advancing something similar to what, for instance, Foucault was saying concurrently in his histories of the asylum, the prison, and so forth: that history, knowledge, and truth itself have no existence outside of the discourse which constitutes them as fields.

What distinguishes Jauss and Mukarovsky from Foucault and post-Althusserian Marxists is the formers' insistence on the relevance of both directions of the dialectic between aesthetic values and history itself.

history, including and especially the socially formative function of aesthetic values and norms. Jauss was consciously mediating between the text-centered formalism which sought to insulate literary study from history, and theory derived from social history and philosophy, which, when it treats aesthetic matters at all, tends to focus on the way aesthetic values are themselves socially informed, or simply the way they reflect society. He sought to achieve this by opening up the closed author-text circuit into a triad including the receiver, with the act of reception as the crucial point at which effect and impact are realized.

In this system, then, literature is conceived not as an object, but as an event experienced by the reader. Literary history is not a series of discrete literary facts surrounding texts and authors, masterpieces and the masters. As Jauss puts it, "The endlessly growing series of literary 'facts' that wind up in literary histories is merely left over from the process. It's only pseudo-history" ("Literary 166). Rather, literary history is the changing experience of readers--their changing influence, reception, and perception. The mechanism is similar to what Raymond Williams called "inherent determination," in which developments (for instance, the fate of a book) grow out of actual relations between texts and among readers in the social process (Williams ch. 2). Jauss uses the analogy of the question and answer (which he has developed as both the paradigm and title of a recent book), in which a text is seen to function as possibly providing answers to relevant questions for its contemporary readers, and in turn raising new questions (aesthetic, philosophical, moral). Both functions alter the reader's horizon, and history itself.

Unlike the reception- and reader-response theory of some of his successors, Jauss's does not depend on a conception of a unified or fixed consciousness of the reader. It is consciousness itself he is conceptualizing in his term 'horizon,' which is no more than the aggregate of the reader's perceptions and conceptions at a given moment, which condition his or her expectations. Change is an inherent condition of Jauss's sense of horizon, which alters not only between generations but from moment to moment. In Jauss's description of an act of reading, one can see how the horizon reflexively shapes/is shaped by the act of reading:

A literary work, even when it appears to be new, does not present itself as something absolutely new in an informational literary vacuum, but predisposes its audience to a very specific kind of reception by announcements, overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics, or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses expectations for the 'middle and end,' which can then be maintained intact or altered, reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text.... A corresponding process of the continuous establishing and altering of horizons also determines the relationship of the individual text to the succession of texts that forms the genre. The new text evokes for the reader the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected,

altered, or even just reproduced. ("Literary" 167)

The text itself represents for the reader some other horizon, to the extent that it is an alien text or a text from the distant past; consequently the dialectic process lay in the interaction (in its simplest form) between two horizons to produce a third, new horizon.

Jauss's method of aesthetic analysis, then, involves reconstruction of the synchronic moment of a text's appearance. For literary history this would involve recreating a series of changing synchronic moments. He concedes that ultimately the possibility of literary history depends upon whether the horizon can be objectified, and this improbable condition has been one of the chief criticisms he has born since his groundbreaking early essays. But even the attempt would be superior to literary history in which some extrinsic set of standard principles, whether Platonic, Aristotelian, Kantian, or something else, is applied abstractly. (These would be relevant, but only in the way they operate or are made to operate, not as an abstract standard.)

In fact, Jauss accepts and builds on Hans-Georg Gadamer's critique of historicism: a past moment cannot be reconstructed objectively, because it cannot be isolated from the interpreter's own horizon: "The reconstructed [moment] can no longer stand within its original horizon because this historical horizon is always already enveloped within the horizon of the present" ("Literary" 172). Inevitably, as Gadamer puts it, "understanding is always the process of the fusion of these horizons that we suppose to exist by themselves" (qtd. in "Literary" 172). If meaning is produced dialectically then the elements must be understood relatively, for each is mediated by the other: the reader's

consciousness is altered and in some measure determined by what he or she reads; yet a text can only be interpreted subjectively through the reader's horizon at that moment. By extension, judging the work of a Poe critic of another period entails reconstituting his or her horizon (recognizing that this process is itself a constitution of our own.)

It is well beyond the scope of this study to recreate the series of synchronic moments from the time of Pym's appearance; or even to reproduce a few of them. Yet many of the critical and scholarly problems Pym has presented bear as much or more upon factors in the critic's contemporary situation as upon the text of Pym; the environment shapes the way, and even whether, critics approach Pym.

Stanley Fish illuminates this principle and illustrates one such set of factors: the lateral institutional pressures brought to bear on successive generations of critics as they read Milton ("Transmuting"). What he examines specifically is the integration, around the mid-twentieth century, of the atypical and problematic Books XI and XII into the criticism of Paradise Lost. While critics assume continuity and growth of understanding, and, implicitly, that they see clearly unlike their predecessors, Fish shows that the change in the status of XI and XII rather reflected a change in academic norms. Entrenched principles of New Criticism encouraged critics to overlook these two final books for their looser form. Scholarship of the time even questioned their authenticity. The rehabilitation of this material occurred with a change in accepted critical criteria: historical criticism integrating theology, and archetypal criticism, both of which found the final two books relevant and integral.⁴

Fish argued that literary history must regard art works as "products" as well as "objects" of critical activity, and that each generation reads and reconstitutes a text on the basis of its own assumptions and criteria. I have suggested that Pym violates the rules of every discursive form in which it presents itself, or which it introduces. One pattern we will find in the criticism is a critic or scholar seizing upon Pym to advance a particular critical or historical program, based on particular critical assumptions, whether of Poe, American writing, or critical theory, only to find elements within the text undermining the very stance it seemed to support. G. R. Thompson was the first to suggest the double significance in the ironic prose of Poe: that a philosophical, psychological, or scientific statement is simultaneously offered positively and ironically (Poe's Fiction 9).

Readings of Pym must be understood in relation to the context from which they grow, as much as in relation to the text itself. A reading will stand in some positive or negative relation to current mainstream or elite views of American literature, Poe, and Pym itself. Sometimes "mainstream" will mean one prestigious essay--Griswold's on Poe's life, Bonaparte's on Poe's work, Patrick Quinn on Pym--which shapes the discourse of a decade or more. Probably the most significant lateral pressure on Pym critics are prevailing attitudes in America toward Poe and his body of work.

Influencing these attitudes, in turn, has been the French criticism. While reaction has always been extensively delayed, measured in decades, most developments in Poe and Pym criticism in America have been anticipated in France. This pattern has been remarkably consistent

growing debate here. Beyond this, these two essays can be said to be for a century and a half. Charles Baudelaire's enthusiasm for Poe never produced the cult here, even briefly, that it produced there as a permanent establishment, where Poe has been recognized as a founder, through Baudelaire's own mediation, of modern French symbolist poetics, both by his theory and his original genius. On the other hand, his claim that the "new literature" founded by Poe lay in his deep probing of psychological, moral and mental process would be picked up --albeit a century later--in some of the earliest serious American critics of Poe, such as Tate, Eliot and Edmund Wilson. Original, enthusiastic studies of aspects of Poe's work by French poets and theorists were to mark out territory that would become fields of American study of Poe: in the nineteenth century Stephane Mallarmé's commentary and translation of the studies of Poe, neither will it be a strictly chronological account. poetry as coherent and disciplined and in the early twentieth Paul Valéry's essays arguing for the original integrity of Poe's aesthetic inherent in strict adherence to either structural principle. A theory.

Marie Bonaparte's psychoanalytic study appeared in 1933, articulating in perhaps the most exhaustive psychoanalysis of any artist the first thorough account of the elusive quality of Poe's work. Gaston Bachelard's scattered comments in the late thirties on Poe's fiction latent in some context of continuity, suppressing elements of discontinuity which might threaten the historian's thesis. Moreover, dream-consciousness may have contributed to the body of Jungian- and strictly chronological sequence often implicitly assumes a more or less myth-related criticism. Jacques Lacan's 1956 "Le Séminaire sur 'La Lettre volée'", (translated in 1972 as "The Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" and Derrida's reply, "Le facteur de la vérité" (1975; translated as "The Purveyor of Truth" (1975) were at the front end of the pioneering studies in the nineteen-fifties, for instance, remain the importation of poststructural theory from France, and sparked an among the most insightful ever made.

ongoing debate here. Beyond this, these two essays can be said to be the seminal forces in a drastic reconfiguration of a mainstream of American criticism of Poe; more so than of other American writers. Whether the French response is taken as a whole, or individually, it seems inevitable that the sheer prestige lent to Poe in the attention he has received from the French giants of poetry and theory has had a positive impact on Poe's status in the American academy.⁵

Though this study groups critical statements according to issues they entail, and, to a certain extent, according to ideological orientation and critical strategy, it is not structured strictly on a 'schools' principle; and though it will begin with the nineteenth-century reaction and end with the current deconstructionist studies of Poe, neither will it be a strictly chronological account. Rather, drawing from both, it will attempt to avoid certain assumptions inherent in strict adherence to either structural principle. A structure based on critical approaches tends either to assume or to create the illusion of determinate boundaries between approaches, and rarely do they offer a judgment more profound than that Poe is delightful, interesting, pleasant, tedious, or disappointing. Chronological histories tend to place the literary work or the critical statement in some context of continuity, suppressing elements of discontinuity which might threaten the historian's thesis. Moreover, strictly chronological sequence often implicitly assumes a more or less steady progression from ignorance to the truth about the meaning and significance of the work. Both sets of assumptions, fallacious in general, prove emphatically so in the history of Poe criticism: some of the pioneering studies in the nineteen-fifties, for instance, remain among the most insightful ever made.

performer becomes the dominant one in this chapter. Since his poetry, short stories, and criticism are the most famous literary names in America by 1945 (with the popular success of Tales of the

Chapters will be structured on the basis of issues and concerns entailed in the studies. The idea is to involve chronology, critical strategy, and ideology as three coordinates relating critical texts to one another, at the same time minimizing the totalizing tendency of any one of them alone.

Chapter Two covers approximately the first hundred years of the critical history of Pym. This period is marked at one end by Pym's initial publication by Harper's Brothers on July 17, 1838, and at the other by the commencement of recognition and discussion of the work as worthy or interesting by a number of influential American voices. We turn first to the thirty known contemporary reviews of Pym. The reviewers made little attempt at interpretation or evaluation according to criteria of high art, focusing more on its prospects for popular success. Rarely do they offer a judgment more profound than that Pym is delightful, interesting, pleasant, tedious, or disappointing.

Beyond the contemporary response, we examine the subsequent one hundred years, a period in which Poe's status was problematic and marked by serious reservations. The chapter gives an account of the brief, often perfunctory treatment of Pym in early Poe biography and scholarship; and then examines the ambivalent, complex response to Pym of two early modern figures, Henry James and T. S. Eliot.

But the factor which conditions each of these latter two groups of responses more than any other is Poe's own reputation, a subject which

performance becomes the dominant one in this chapter. Since his poetry, short stories, and criticism made him one of the most famous literary names in America by 1945 (with the popular success of Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque and The Raven and Other Poems that year), and since his work steadily if slowly grew in stature over this period, the almost total silence on Pym requires scrutiny. The analysis focusses upon the factors surrounding the public perception of Poe and his work. The popular image was of a dissolute, wild, and more or less irrational artist, an image shared and fostered by the many literary professional--editors, critics, writers--who had been stung in personal association with Poe, particularly his critical pen. Long after his death they perpetuated his reputation as, variously, a drug addict and drunk, a man of morally unsound character, and a trivial, 19th-century sensationalistic artist--a "jingle-man," in Emerson's phrase. The biography reinforced a moralistic tendency to identify Poe with his own pathological characters.

While Poe's reputation was related to a variety of interlocking extrinsic causes, there is certainly cause with the writing itself for the widespread dismissal of Poe as a serious artist, as measured by the aesthetic values and literary norms of the early nineteenth century. In a colonial culture so intensely religious that its own literature almost begins and ends in forms of religious expression, didactic and moral sentiment inevitably became powerful, shaping principles of post-colonial literature; similarly, a nation whose founding political documents and institutions were conceived within an Enlightenment and empiricist framework will unsurprisingly exhibit a bias toward rational

elements in literature. Indeed, it may be that the very violence of Poe's critical pen is an index of the difficulty in this culture of the task of liberating the imaginative literary work from contingency. Much of the nineteenth century resistance to Poe in general as well as Pym may lay in the ways in which he subverted the traditional bases of authority, and the dense lexicon of literary conventions by which the writer reassured his or her readers of his/her fidelity to them. The few proponents of the autonomous literary imagination in America, such as Irving, Brown, and Hawthorne, did so only furtively and ambiguously; only Poe preached this principle unreservedly in his criticism, and practiced it in his art.⁶

Pym itself exemplifies perhaps more than any nineteenth-century text the autonomy of the imagination, as Pym floats away from New England, the perceived heart of moral authority, beyond the very bounds of the 'real' world. His narrative challenges the most axiomatic structures of our self-identity, as he moves from the known world to an unknown, from the real to the surreal, and beyond the established boundaries of moral, rational and empirical authority. This ideological rebelliousness may explain why nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critics in particular have responded negatively to Pym.

Chapter three examines the lines of Pym criticism that are oriented by a psychological approach. This is a wide-ranging category, including any reading that finds symbolized meaning referring to an unconscious realm, whether personal or collective. It marks a watershed, in two senses: it was the first to identify multiple levels of meaning; and

secondly, it was the first to recognize that madness and death, dissolution of mind and body, are at the thematic core. As such, it has provided a mechanism for confronting what so many critics before and since have sought to avoid, the perverse behavior of Pym and the disturbing anxieties, aggression, and morbidity that circulate through the text.

It is the dominant approach to follow the biographically-oriented criticism discussed in chapter two, and can be seen as an extension of the same logic, for it holds Poe and his texts in roughly the same relation: the key to understanding Poe's work is Poe himself, with particular reference to mental soundness or psychological percipience. The early, cruder Freudian studies reduced the author and his text to the same approximate configuration: the critic is analyst, Poe is patient, and the text is a set of symptomatic data, treated as an analogue of the analysand's transcript of a dream or a session. Later approaches revised this to see Poe or his narrator as the analyst, restoring the psychic or familial order which the story's antagonist has destabilized. New Criticism-influenced studies that incorporate psychoanalytic materials into allegorical interpretations prioritize form over analysis of latent content, and constitute a substantive, second category. They see Poe as consciously representing psychic laws and processes, especially in a disintegrative trajectory. Though Jungian archetypal criticism is often treated as a separate category, much of it is based upon the same assumptions and logic as psychoanalytic criticism, as Jungian analytic theory itself is fundamentally derivative of Freud. Those myth readings that see Pym as

a visionary text imaging a model of the divine rather than the unconscious are treated under the subheading of Romanticism in chapter five.

With the exception of Allen Tate, the leading New Critics had little to say about Poe. As New Criticism began to influence and shape formal study of fiction, Pym began to attract attention, in the nineteen-sixties and -seventies. Chapter four examines the discourse that emerged in this period involving Pym's merit on the basis of formal and technical criteria. Debate developed about its genre classification, and about internal formal issues involving structure, style, symbolism, irony, and narrative issues. Doubt about its seriousness and integrity as a unified whole, and about whether it even merited analysis, formal or thematic, remained a substantial position in the debate. These doubters found a good deal of supporting evidence in the substantial scholarship being done at this time. Source study, which had dominated the Pym commentary in Poe biography since the late nineteenth century, moved into high gear, and the contention that the narrative was little more than a pastiche of scores of pretexts, was being corroborated in detail. (Indeed, Burton Pollin has found that as much as a fifth of it is copied verbatim or close paraphrase [Kopley Poe's 95]). Additionally, important compositional studies reconstructed the writing process, again supporting doubters by finding the narrative to have been written in fits and starts over three years, comprised of anywhere from two to four "narratives" jerry-rigged together to make a marketable book.

What unites these intrinsic textual analyses, genre studies, and

scholarly studies is their attempt to contain and regulate a seemingly irrational text by the accumulation of fact, within and/or around it. The studies advance models of order based on internal relationship of its elements, or by embedding the text in a larger contextual frame of genre or biography, or both.

Chapter five examines studies that historicize Pym. Like those of chapter four, they seek to align Pym within a larger context, but the contextual frame is not an abstract system of poetic values, but a cultural or intellectual theory. The central, implicit question they seek to resolve is: what is, or should be the status of Pym in the American literary tradition, or in literary or philosophic Romanticism? In examining their answers, we must ourselves ask how the differences Pym represents are dealt with, for the potential threat posed by any incongruous text to a totalizing theory. For it is clear that in these approaches, as much as any, we can see Pym appropriated for agendas comprehending far more than one text; elucidation of the text is a mean, not an end. It is often engaged in a mutual relationship with the model within which it is situated. Pym acquires meaning and merit by its association with the model, which it helps to make coherent by its support as an example. For Pym we find two dominant traditions relevant: First, American literary historiography, which from its beginnings in the early twentieth century has sought to define a distinctly American literary tradition, identifying uniquely American cultural and historical patterns, and distinguishing American "myths." Particularly with the development of a 'dark' tradition theory, which perceived a dominant subversive impulse and a Gothic literary form, Pym

gained an increasingly prominent place. Secondly, and related to this project, Americans sought to situate Pym along with other American texts within the Western intellectual tradition, particularly international literary and philosophic Romanticism.

The final chapter concerns readings that perceive Poe to be a modern writer or a precursor of modernism, including poststructural readings. The explosion of interest in Poe in the eighties and nineties correlates with the establishment of language-focused deconstruction theory. He has come to be seen as the richest mine in American literature for revealing the crisis of language at the core of modern experience. And of Poe texts, Pym has proven to be one of the most interesting to critics. The rich fund of textual, structural, and stylistic irregularities which until recently were regarded as flaws in a writer working outside his natural media, have come to be seen as deliberate and meaningful comment. A number of critics of Poe focus upon his deconstruction of the relationship between word and thing, or language and meaning, by exposing the futility of the quest for an original presence. It has seemed to them to be richly ironic and self-referential, folding back upon itself to comment upon its own textuality, raising questions about the very fictive, linguistic, and cognitive structures that constitute it; calling attention to its own complex performance; and questioning its own proffered grounds of authority.

Among the contributions of the poststructural readings is a frame that allows for the wider play of signification Poe indulges in. Critics have suggested a surprising array of techniques by which Poe

raises issues of language and selfhood. He depicts the void of language by imaging the abyss. He violates the fictive veneer of his text so painstakingly constructed in the Preface by depicting the authorial self penetrating his own text, in the form of "Mr. Poe," hidden signatures (such as the petroglyphs,) and self-reflexive metaphors of script and scripting blurring the boundaries between text and world, and deconstructing the illusion of the transparency of the word.

Questions involving selfhood are inevitably insinuated in this framework. Perhaps the best reading to date is John T. Irwin's American Hieroglyphs (1980), which analyzes the constitution of consciousness in writing, selfhood emerging out of the mutually-constitutive opposition of doubles: a perceiving, recognizing, writing self and his/her text, the written self, or double by which self-recognition and consciousness occurs. Dennis Pahl describes a struggle between the two scripted selves, Pym and the "Mr. Poe" inscribed 'by' Pym, for mastery and presence, each futilely striving to 'discover' themselves outside of the textuality that is imaged everywhere, in notes, cryptograms, and the textualized landscape of petroglyphs.

Frank Lentricchia postulates that American Deconstructionists have fundamentally misunderstood Derrida in focusing upon the abyss within the text rather than the historical traces, the retensions and protensions that surround the text and link it too the intertextual web of which it is a part (New Criticism 173-74, etc.). The nineteen eighties saw a renewed interest in the historical and sociological readings which, while sharing basic deconstructionists' recognition of

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the linguistic constitution of meaning, broaden the frame to seek to understand the cultural determination. Gerald Kennedy, Dana Nelson, Irwin and others offer richly intertextual readings that provide a depth and authenticity beyond the temporally abstracted deconstructions. Moreover, this approach takes them beyond the question of the transparency of language to philosophic, aesthetic, and social questions Pym poses, involving for instance the ideologies of death (Kennedy), and of race and colonialism (Nelson); the German Idealist appropriation of the Arabesque pictorial form (Thompson); the extant body of popular literary forms conflated in Pym (David Reynolds); Poe's use of the Hegelian dialectic (Evan Carton), and his rewriting of Lockean empiricism and Edwardsian theology (Joan Dayan), to name a few. Many of these last-mentioned are discussed in other chapters, but they are of recent vintage, and they demonstrate that Pym criticism remains as varied and as vital as in any period.

Finally, an afterword discusses overall patterns and trends that have emerged.

Notes

¹ What does exist has been done well. This includes three reports by Pollin discussing contemporary reviews he has uncovered; Frank ("Polarized") and Robinson ("Reading"), both covering 1950-1980; and Ketterer ("Tracing"), covering 1980-1989. See the latter fine essay and list for dissertations and international studies.

² Preface.1. Quotations from Pym are from Burton Pollin's The Imaginary Voyages: The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall, The Journal of Julius Rodman, vol. 1 of The Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe, 4 vols. to date. (Boston: Twayne, 1981-) 53-363. To facilitate use of other editions, Pollin's notation system will be used, referring to chapter number and paragraph number, divided by a period. References to Pym's "Preface" or "Note" will use those words. Two chapters of the first edition of Pym were numbered 23, and will be referenced as 23A and 23B, following Pollin. Citations of Poe's nonfiction will refer to G. R. Thompson, ed., Edgar Allan Poe: Essays and Reviews, Library of America Ser. (Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., New York: 1984). Citations to Poe's poetry and short fiction will refer to Patrick Quinn, ed., Edgar Allan Poe: Poetry and Tales, Library of America Ser. (Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., New York: 1984).

³ See especially Jauss "Literary History" and Question and Answer, and Mukarovsky Aesthetic Function. My discussion of both men's views are drawn largely from these two works.

⁴ In fact, Fish's thesis goes beyond this: Lewis, he argues, perceived the value of XI and XII on the basis of archetypal content not then acceptable in academic circles; but remaining judiciously quiet about this, he defended Paradise Lost as a whole on the basis of contemporary New Critical principles, contributing to the rehabilitation of the poem and thereby creating the possibility of an eventual reconciliation of XI and XII with the remainder.

⁵ For discussion of the French response to Poe, see Patrick Quinn, the most thorough and influential such study in English, and Jean Alexander, which in addition to providing many documents in translation, includes an extensive discussion of the French perception of Poe and his work. See also Jefferson Humphries, Metamorphoses of the Raven: Literary Overdeterminedness in France and the South Since Poe (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), which opines that the sense in which Poe's work reflects the social crisis of the antebellum South that would culminate in war and disintegration, is the sense in which he appealed to post-Revolutionary France. Donald Pease also makes insightful comments along this line in chapter five of Visionary

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Compacts. Unlike Alexander and Humphries, Quinn deals extensively with Pym, in addition to the stories. He sees the perennial appeal of Poe for the French to be his "power, the extent of which he scarcely knew himself, to bring up to the surface of consciousness the kind of submerged emotional life that the intelligence prefers to ignore." This interest in psychological "profundities," he surmises, led to Baudelaire's attraction and the psychological-oriented explorations of Bonaparte and Bachelard. Fatal Destinies is the most complete English translation of Baudelaire's writing on Poe. Mallarmé's "Notes to the Poems of Poe" (pp. 215-18), and Valéry's "On Eureka" (233-43) are reprinted in Alexander.

Other important poststructural studies by French critics besides Lacan and Derrida are those of Jean Ricardou, Maurice Lévy, Maurice Mourier, and Roger Asselineau. Lacan's essay, Derrida's reply, and American responses have been reprinted in Muller. See also Jeffrey Mehlman, "Poe Pourri: Lacan's Purloined Letter," Aesthetics Today, ed. Morris Philipson and Paul J. Gudel (New York: New American Library, 1980), 413-32; Claude Richard, "Destin, Design, Dasein: Lacan, Derrida and 'The Purloined Letter,'" Iowa Review 12 (1981), 1-10; and Donald Pease, "Marginal Politics and 'The Purloined Letter': A Review Essay," Poe Studies 16 (1983), 18-23.

⁶See Bell, esp. chs. 2 and 5; and Porté, Romance, ch. 2.

Chapter Two

"We Do Not See Any Good End in Such Descriptions":

Moral Censure and the First Hundred Years

1

Context

The contemporary attention to The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym is appropriate to begin with for at least two reasons in addition to its chronological priority. First, Poe's substantial reputation as a poet and short fiction writer would not exist till the mid-eighteen forties. On the other hand, while he had already become well known as a sharp, often vicious critic from his post at the Southern Literary Messenger from 1835 to 1837, he had yet to accumulate the enmity among influential literary figures in New York, Boston and Philadelphia that would ruin his reputation for decades beyond his death. Since practically everything written about Poe's work in America after 1845 (and for about a hundred years thereafter) is colored in some way by his personal or professional reputation--often marshalled as either an attack on or defense of the man himself--the contemporary notice of his early work provides the first and last opportunity to examine reaction more or less to the writing without the writer. But if we are free of his personal and legendary notoriety for the moment, the briefest look at the reviews

shows that there were a good many other extratextual elements just as firmly shaping that response.

The most important of these is the set of expectations generated by the literary environment within which Pym took its place. The second reason to begin with contemporary notice, then, is that Pym for the most part was accepted or rejected for what it seems to project itself as. It was received in the context of the norms of the popular modes of which it appeared to be an example, unclouded by the later theoretical issues surrounding canonization of Pym as a great American book, or Poe's relation to the American masters. Interestingly, once Poe's slow redemption from the cultural near-oblivion to which his contemporary literary establishment consigned him was complete, Pym's 20th-Century rediscovery also would be on popular criteria: W. H. Auden in his decisive American reintroduction of the novel in 1950 praised it as an "adventure story" with "interest, excitement, terror... in which every kind of adventure occurs—... shipwreck... mutiny... strange natives... supernatural nightmare events" (Carlson Recognition 222).

In many respects Pym resembles numerous commercially successful narratives of voyages of exploration, naval expedition, trade, whaling and missionary activity in what was still in large part a sea-oriented society. The title alone indicates the sensational appeal Poe intended, whatever else he intended:

THE NARRATIVE
OF
ARTHUR GORDON PYM
OF NANTUCKET
COMPRISING THE DETAILS OF A MUTINY AND ATROCIOUS BUTCHERY
ON BOARD THE AMERICAN BRIG GRAMPUS, ON HER WAY TO
THE SOUTH SEAS, IN THE MONTH OF JUNE, 1827
WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE RECAPTURE OF THE VESSEL BY THE
SURVIVORS; THEIR SHIPWRECK AND SUBSEQUENT HORRIBLE
SUFFERINGS FROM FAMINE; THEIR DELIVERANCE BY
MEANS OF THE BRITISH SCHOONER JANE GUY; THE
BRIEF CRUISE OF THIS LATTER VESSEL IN THE
ANTARCTIC OCEAN; HER CAPTURE, AND THE
MASSACRE OF HER CREW AMONG A
GROUP OF ISLANDS IN THE
EIGHTY-FOURTH PARALLEL OF SOUTHERN LATITUDE;
TOGETHER WITH THE INCREDIBLE ADVENTURES AND
DISCOVERIES
STILL FURTHER SOUTH
TO WHICH THAT DISTRESSING CALAMITY GAVE RISE

The appeal to the popular taste for adventure, disaster, violence, the prurient, and the exotic could not be more explicit. The similarity to the title of one of the most popular sea adventures, that of Samuel Woodworth, for instance, is illustrative. Pym's own publisher, Harper and Brothers, brought it out in 1832 under the pseudonym Benjamin Morrell: *The Narrative of Four Voyages to the South Sea, North and South Pacific Ocean, and Antarctic Ocean, Chinese Sea, Ethiopic and Southern Atlantic Ocean, and Antarctic Ocean. From the year 1822 to 1831. Comprising the Account of some valuable Discoveries, including the Massacre Islands, where thirteen of the Author's Crew were massacred and eaten by Cannibals.*

However, the indications are that despite its large publisher and fairly wide notice, Pym did not enjoy the market success of Woodworth's and many others' sea adventure narratives. One of the few known documents in either Poe's or Harpers' correspondence pertaining to Pym's market performance is an 1839 letter in which Harpers tells Poe that less than one hundred copies had been sold in America. It also reported that it was "inclined to believe" the book sold better in England, on the basis of the sale of one hundred copies they sent to London.¹ Two editions appeared there, one by Wiley & Putnam in 1938, the sales of which were good enough to require a reprint, and a cheap, pirated edition in "The Novel Newspaper," in 1941 (Pollin, "Bibliography" 100). Moreover, the English reviews tend to be more favorable, longer, and more penetrating than the American reviews.

The Contemporary Notice

In a series of articles in the nineteen-seventies Burton Pollin corrected the long-held assumptions that Pym was little noticed by contemporary reviewers, and that the few who did received it poorly. Killis Campbell, in his 1933 discussion of Poe's contemporary reception cited only three, and as late 1967 Sidney Kaplan stated unequivocally that Pym was "almost totally ignored by reviewers," and cited a single, entirely hostile review (146). Research by Pollin and several others has uncovered nineteen American reviews and announcements, in addition to the three Campbell mentions, and six in British periodicals.²

The claim to wide notice, however, must be tempered by the fact that fourteen of these are in newspapers, and most of these are little more than announcements. As I. M. Walker points out, few periodicals could entirely ignore a book brought out by one of the largest firms in the country. Moreover, while Harpers was capable of disseminating a relatively large number of review copies, a number of notices seem to have been based on little more than perusal of the title page, and appropriation of its language. A key truth revealed by both the content and location of the reviews confirms that Pym was largely received as it seems to offer itself, as a form of sensational entertainment; and it was noticed mostly by popular or general interest magazines of wider circulation, the only exceptions being the more highbrow Albion and New York Review. The brief notice of The Sunday Morning News, of August 5, 1838, typifies the way many reviewers perceived Pym's function: "[T]he

lovers of the marvellous will have a fine treat for a summer's day in its perusal" ("Snowden" 33).

Recent scholarship has concerned itself with ways in which American literature is rooted in and derived from the immediate cultural context from which it is so often abstracted. In this mission, David Reynolds conceives his Beneath the American Renaissance as a "complement" to the work of F. O. Matthiessen. Insofar as The American Renaissance establishes the lines of influence upon American writers of European classical literature, from Homer to Coleridge, Reynolds analyzes the emergence of the same set of American classics from contemporary American culture, focussing upon the products of the new, burgeoning popular press. Many of the American 'classics,' he maintains, emerge out of crosswinds of influence from a variety of popular modes, while some, like Pym, are actually part and parcel of the popular press in several of its forms. Largely working with the traditional canon he inherited from Matthiessen's generation, Reynolds stops short of assigning Pym canonical status, calling it a "failure" and devoting only about one page to it. Its interest for him lay in its rich intercourse, along with most of Poe's fiction, with popular modes, and in that respect it is among the purest illustrations of Reynolds' overall thesis.

One of the most important factors among the conditions surrounding the appearance of Pym that give meaning to the contemporary responses is the wave of economic transformation which American society as a whole, and the literary world in particular, were experiencing at that moment.³ What is relevant here is the industrialization of printing

and the commercialization of public writing, between approximately 1820 and 1860. Prior to this, books were read and written by a small number of culturally "elite." As late as 1830 there were very few writers sustaining themselves by writing, and as Michael Gilmore points out, only 109 books of fiction were produced by Americans in the preceding decade. In the 'forties there were over a thousand, in a market that could, for instance, provide Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) with a sale of 350,000 copies in its first year (4). Michael Gilmore, Karl Polanyi and others describe factors that contributed to the rapid commodification of literary products on a historically unparalleled scale.⁴

During the same period American letters went through a qualitative transformation as great as the quantitative change in the literary market. The sensationalization of journalism and most other kinds of mass-produced literature was not only concurrent with the explosion of the market, but in any analysis inextricably linked to it. Characterized by lurid treatment of such subjects as remarkable trials and criminals, discoveries or adventures at sea or in the west, discoveries in the sciences or such 'pseudosciences' as spiritualism, mass-produced literature tapped the popular tastes. Fiction, imitating journalism, and hoping to imitate its success, emerged in every journalistic format, as well as traditional ones, from articles in the penny newspapers and cheap magazines, to pamphlets on remarkable crimes, to cheaply-produced novels.

An early example of a mass-appeal news magazine, cited by Reynolds, illustrates the directions of current public taste: The American Book of Wonders and Marvellous Chronicle (1809). Among its 'news' items we

recognize material Poe would tap for Pym and other pieces: cannibalism, extreme suffering, bizarre creatures, live burial, ghosts, a raven with human speech and intelligence, and an ape running loose in New York with a pair of scissors (173). The most remarkable point Reynolds establishes, and one quite significant from the standpoint of Pym criticism, is not the rich textual, structural, and imaginative debt Poe owes to contemporary literature--the contemporary reviewers themselves make that point--but the fact that the most shocking, brutal and revolting scenes which seemed to set Pym apart, and do set it apart from the Renaissance literature that has endured, were typical fare of the day. In the two areas of taste to which critics traditionally have objected--the revolting aspect of some scenes and all the extravagant improbabilities--Reynolds documents numerous large-selling contemporaries who outshined Poe.

Poe himself pinpointed 1834 as the crucial shift in journalism, with the establishment of the New York Sun, the first successful penny newspaper, and in the process indicated an awareness of the profound social impact of the sensational press. He wrote, "The consequences of the scheme [of the Sun's founder, Moses Beach, and editor, Richard Adam Locke] in their influence on the whole newspaper business of the country, and through this business on the interests of the country at large, are probably beyond all calculation" (Essays and Reviews 1214). He was prefacing a discussion of one such effect, the series of variously legitimate, sensational and outright fictitious journal articles that prepared the way for Richard Adam Locke's extremely successful 'moon hoax' article of 1835, including Poe's own fictitious

account of a balloon ascent to the moon, "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall" (1835). In Poe's story, which resembles a hoax (though it does not seem to have hoaxed its readers⁵), Poe satirizes both sensational journalism, and his own contribution to it, in "Pfaall": in an introductory remark, the narrator asks "Who, let me ask you, ever heard of a balloon manufactured entirely of dirty newspapers?"⁶

The voyages of both Pfaall and Pym were taken as articles of sensational appeal. But however singular Poe's intent for Pym seems on its face, the issue becomes complicated at the very moment of initial reaction, by the variety of expectations, fulfilled or not, with which the first readers read. Analysis of the critiques, summaries and announcements yields a range of types which they implicitly assume Poe to be striving for with Pym.

Though there is a good deal of ambivalence and uncertainty within the reviews, reviewers generally understood Pym to be at least one of three forms of adventure narrative: an authentic travel journal, such as the then-prevalent collections of "mariner's chronicles"; a fictional but realistic travel journal, such as Defoe's Robinson Crusoe; or a fantastic narrative without the constraints of verisimilitude, for example Swift's Gulliver's Travels. Their estimates of Pym's value varied in part according to varied criteria appropriate to the form by which they chose to perceive it.

The three categories are tied to journalism itself in slightly different ways. Readers who took it as a factual report, or a purportedly factual one, perceived it as journalism itself, and measured it foremost according to authenticity. Those who held it to this

criterion and found it to be inauthentic--which were all but two reviewers who took it at face value--did not accept it then as fiction, but dismissed it as a hoax, a "deception," or a "lie." The reviewer of the Metropolitan Magazine, of London, is an example: "As a romance, some portions of it are sufficiently amusing and exciting; but, when palmed upon the public as a true thing, it cannot appear in any other light than that of a bungling business--an impudent attempt at imposing on the credulity of the ignorant" ("Contemporary" 48).

The only entirely censorious American review is also in this category; it is also the longest- and best-known, and undoubtedly responsible for the false perception that Pym generally was received poorly. The heat in William Burton's review in the September, 1838 issue of Burton's Gentleman's Magazine apparently does not come, as one might suppose, from personal animus; it would be almost two years before Burton was to fire Poe, a year after hiring him as editor of Gentleman's. Rather, it stems from a sense of insult as a reader. While Pym suffers from "discrepancies and other errors," "faulty construction," and "poorness of style," it is because Pym is "a d--d lie!" that "compelled us to throw it away in contempt." He implies he might have accepted it as a fictional account, and cites Swift's Gulliver's Travells (1726), More's Utopia (1516), Robert Paltock's Life and Adventures of Peter Wilkins (1751), Sinbad of The Arabian Nights, and several other works that signal their own fictionality. Unlike these, Pym lacks substance--the "political satire of Swift," for instance--and is not "confessedly a work of the imagination" ("Contemporary" 39).

A more imaginative group of reviewers accepted Pym as fiction, and judged it foremost on the criterion of verisimilitude. The New York Review of October 1838 invokes by comparison two popular verisimilar fictitious voyages. In Pym there is a commendable attempt "by simplicity of style, minuteness of nautical description, and circumstantiality of narration, to throw over it that air of reality which constitutes the charm of Robinson Crusoe, and [Jane Porter's] Sir Edward Seaward's Narrative [1831]" (Contemporary 44). Unlike these, Pym is judged a failure in its departure from the standard invoked: the conclusion "breaks off suddenly in a mysterious way, which is not only destitute of vraisemblance, but is purely perplexing and vexatious. We cannot therefore but consider the author unfortunate in his plan" ("Contemporary" 44)

If Burton advised the author to contain sensational materials by adherence to factual truth, and the New York Review writer thought they should be contained by imaginative restraint, the largest share of reviewers more or less welcomed with good humor Pym's most extravagant elements. Whatever they were expecting, they register delight at the surprises, the excitement, and, in words frequently used, the "wonders" that "abound" in Pym. Typically for this group, the review in Horace Greeley's weekly New Yorker, of 1837, found it "a work of extraordinary, freezing interest....Those who delight in the wonderful and horrible have a feast before them" (43). The Family Magazine of 1839 proclaimed "Commend us to Arthur Gordon Pym! He is a genius and his adventures rare and wonderful," and the reader may find himself "ready and willing to admit" that they are "more astonishing than any before recorded" ("Contemporary" 46).

Pollin opines that no contemporary reviewer saw Poe's "playful method" (Imaginary 15). On the contrary, few critics in subsequent decades responded to the playfulness and humor as appreciatively as this group. Whatever their duties at their respective posts, they clearly enjoyed the responsibility of reading and reviewing Pym. Since then, only W. H. Auden and Pollin himself have responded to this dimension. Several 'banter' with Poe by affecting a tone of dismissal, outrage, or astonishment at having been 'taken for a ride,' only to express delight in the trip. In a review on August 22, 1838, the Alexander's Weekly Messenger, of Philadelphia, reprints the title, and follows:

Think of that Master Brook! What say you, reader to that for a title page? We assure you the book, if possible, is more marvellous still. Captain Riley's narrative⁷ was a tame affair, compared to it. Incredible' forsooth! The author should have said impossible. What will our nautical friends say to the feat of running a sloop with a jib...?⁸ What will the government say to the discoveries near the south pole? Will they not recall the southern exploring expedition,⁹ which is rendered wholly unnecessary by Pym's discoveries? What will the Nantucket folks say to the miracle of a vessel being fitted out from that port, which had never been heard of there...?¹⁰

(Walker 94-95)

The diatribe continues, only to culminate in endorsement for a "very clever extravaganza, after the manner of De Foe. It indicates great

talent and vivacity, and will be perused with amusement by every class of readers" (Walker 94-5). Pollin identifies "Brook" as the name Ford assumes in The Merry Wives of Windsor. Perhaps the buyer and reader of Pym, the reviewer seems to suggest, will pay for his or her own seduction, as Ford pays Falstaff to seduce his own wife.

In a similar tone of banter, the Philadelphia Saturday Courier, of August 4, 1838, calls the book "as full of 'incredibles' as man can desire....Jack the Giant Killer is a fool to 'Peters.'" This reviewer's promotion of Pym is implicit, and perhaps equivocal, as he tantalizes the reader with some of the "incredibles": unspecified discoveries "far beyond the 84th parallel of southern latitude" and "all manner of adventures," only to conclude with an apparently pretended air of offense, which could itself have a promotional effect: "When we find a respectable endorser for Pym's statements, we will think of believing them" ("Contemporary" 42).

With a mischievously embellished summary, a reviewer for the New Monthly Magazine, of London, associates Pym with the tall tale tradition of the American frontier:

Arthur Pym is the American Robinson Crusoe, a man all over wonders, who sees nothing but wonders, vanquishes nothing but wonders, would indeed, evidently, scorn to have anything to do but with wonders, and who, after having been buried in a whirlpool a hundred fathom below the centre of the earth, comes home with a considerable fragment of the magnetic meridian in one pocket, and a frozen slice of the eighty-fourth degree of south latitude in the other, and sits down... to write

his Journal. ("Contemporary" 49)

Sketching a figure less like Robinson Crusoe than Davy Crockett and Paul Bunyan, the reviewer takes his cue from Poe himself in giving his readers quite a bit more than the truth.

While the foregoing has discriminated among basic responses to Pym by focussing upon several more or less internally consistent reviews, taken as a whole, what stands out among these reviews is the ambivalence, hesitancy and equivocation that predominates some, and is evident in most. Some clearly take pleasure in the mixed signals Pym and its infamous title release; others, not knowing how to take it, reflect confusion themselves, as they negotiate Pym's authenticity, literary qualities, and moral content.

A striking example of unstable expectations is the review in the London Atlas of October 20, 1838. The reader is warned he will be surprised at promised discoveries south of the 84th parallel, "but when he comes to read them his surprise will cease." Pym might have been "entertaining, had the writer been a little more careful in subduing his tendency for the marvellous. He has so ridiculously overdone the recital, that the volume cannot impose [sic] on anybody." Sounding nearly as cheated as Burton, and more uncertain about whether the work claims to be the truth, aims at a realistic effect, or neither, he complains that "there are many statements in the book that might be true, and others that could not be true, and the result is that we doubt the vraisemblable, because our faith is shaken by the impossible." He recounts Pym's preface as an apparently authentic history of the narrative, but he refutes other events on a variety of grounds, such as

citing British explorer James Weddell's discoveries (he found the Ronne Ice Shelf at 74° S) as proof that Pym could not have penetrated the eighties.

By the fifth paragraph he acknowledges it might all be a work of fiction "after the manner of Robinson Crusoe," and in the last paragraph he seems finally to regard it as a fantastic story, citing Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1817), and offering an incongruous suggestion for getting Pym home, which the otherwise "fertile imagination" of the author is unable to do: "Could not [Pym] get on the back of an albatross and compel the bird to carry him back to Nantucket? Daniel Rourke, Esq. thus visited the moon on the back of an eagle" (Walker 101-03).

Several reviewers select words which avoid committing the writer as to the kind of work Pym is, or as to its value. In as close to a substantive statement as it gets, the New York Gazette review of July 30, 1838, called Pym "a very extraordinary volume" (Pollin, "American Newspapers" 9). On August 10, 1838 the New York newspaper Star summarized Pym, and cryptically commented "What are we to think of it? There is a deal of ingenious mystification about the author's trip, which everyone must unravel according to his own fancy. For our part we say nothing; but we think we can see as far into a millstone as any body....He tells some wonderful things, that's certain (Pollin, "American Newspapers" 10)

Unfavorable reviewers were quick to condemn Pym for moral irresponsibility. The Monthly Review of October, 1838 complains that some of the "most elaborate scenes...are disgustingly horrible...[and] we do not see any good end in such descriptions" ("Contemporary" 50).

In its mannered prose, the Snowdens Ladies' Companion of September, 1838, expresses, if not outright condemnation of an immoral subject, then unease at a dubious one. Of the unclear authorship of Pym: "It should be a matter of perfect indifference to the public, who the author is; the book has been written and is published, and that, certainly, is knowledge enough." In fact, as the summary that makes up the bulk of the review largely repeats the title, one wonders how much of the book had been read. Explicit judgment--of reservation--is rendered only in the ambivalent last sentence: "From the above synopsis it will be perceived that the work has somewhat of a questionable character, but notwithstanding is most interesting" (Pollin, "Snowden" 33-34). Finally, the negative estimate of the New York Review: Pym "is not destitute of interest for the imagination, but the interest is painful; there are too many atrocities, too many strange horrors..." ("Contemporary" 44).

What becomes apparent in the tangled, miscued, and ambivalent responses is that Pym was subverting its readers' interpretive strategies. The adventure story in the early nineteenth century, like other forms of sensational fiction, had its roots in nonfictional, didactic, and often religiously-charged forms of discourse: narratives of Indian warfare, captivity, wilderness or sea adventure, crime, etc. Yet while it played up the bizarre, the grotesque, and the perverse, it often subtly dropped moralization. This trend, documented by Reynolds, reveals the cultural determination of Pym and others, for these elements represent just those irrational forces that seemed threatening morally and ideologically to a social order increasingly unstable in these

areas. Without moral reassurance or closure, Pym presents topics such as Egyptology, spiritualism, cryptography, and many others which while popular, were also disturbing and ideologically threatening in a variety of ways that have yet to be analyzed in any existing study of Pym. In the Tsalal episodes, for instance, he stimulates the pervasive fear of slave revolt across the American South, heightened in the aftermath of Nat Turner's insurrection in 1831. In the cannibal scenes and others of violence and butchery, he suggests the bestial behavior of which numerous reports from the frontier were demonstrating humans--even white Christians--were capable.

Even the unusual discoveries "South of the 84's" are neither comforting nor clear at the narrative's conclusion. Today we can only speculate about the anxiety felt by earlier generations, whose sense of the world and the cosmos was vulnerable to discoveries in vast "blank spaces" on the world map. Indeed, however ridiculous they seem to us, the widely popular stories of sea-monsters, bizarre cultures and fantastic polar phenomena must be understood in the context of the limitations of definitive knowledge about such matters. Among the reviews of Pym, the ambivalence on one hand, and the heavy-handed tones of indignation on the other betray anxieties that confirm Harry Levin's choice of Poe, a century later, as one of the "triumvirate of disquietude," along with Melville and Hawthorne (34); he might well have included a good many of his now rarely-read contemporaries, such as William Gilmore Simms, Robert Montgomery Bird, Alice Cary, and George Lippard.

The Genteel Censure of Poe

Poe's Nineteenth-Century Reputation

Following the contemporary notices of Pym, there is little discussion of the work over the next one hundred years in any of the fields of discourse in which that might occur--studies of Poe's work, biographical scholarship, statements of literary criticism or history. Though Pym has from the first been available in standard collected works of Poe, there seems to have been little awareness of the work in the literary community apart from Poe specialists. Biographers and scholars dealt with it, but in most cases only as a small cluster of biographical or historical facts. Until W. H. Auden's enthusiastic revelation of Pym in his introduction to his own selection of Poe's writing, in 1950, there appears hardly a single statement about the work that contains more than a few sentences of criticism. Even the appearance of Pym as the major part of the first Collected Works (in 1856, five years after the first three volumes) went all but unnoticed, despite the fact that debate in the press among Poe's friends and enemies was still hot and heavy.¹¹

Perhaps the most curious fact about Pym's history is that Auden 'discovered' Pym only for the critics, for the work itself, if not ubiquitous, has been consistently printed and sold in steadily increasing volume, from the date of its second edition, 1856, onward.

No less than sixty-seven American editions of Pym appeared between that date and 1950, with many reprintings. While inclusion in complete-works editions is not evidence of Pym's popularity, there were numerous exclusive editions of Pym, and of incomplete collections that included it. In fact, it has generally been available in multiple forms, to every class of reader. In his 1978 bibliography of Pym, Burton Pollin reports his conclusion upon examining copies of numerous editions: "Adaptations and cheap two-column newsprint magazines or book copies were available to the youthful and the impecunious, while the affluent could always procure multivolume sets, some handsomely printed and bound" (93).

Available bibliographical information shows not only that Poe was among the most important and popular American authors internationally, but that Pym was among the most popular of his writings. Pollin found three hundred twenty editions, translations and adaptations.

In France it has received critical acclaim, though not universally, from the beginning on par with the rest of Poe's prose. Baudelaire does not say much about Pym in his three influential essays (1852, 1856, 1857) or his prefaces; but then he acknowledges his own inadequacies as a critic, and in fact says little about any of the works in these highly-charged appreciations of his tribulations and his genius. What he does say indicates that in no sense did he regard it as inferior to the short prose, or relegate it to the margins of the Poe canon as unsuccessful or trivial, as American critics and scholars would for over a century. He brought it out as the third of his five-volume translation, and attempted to interest the critic Sainte-Beuve in what

he called "a purely human book" and "an admirable novel": "You, who so love profundities, why not investigate the profundities of Edgar Poe?" (qtd. in P. Quinn French Face 171). Since Baudelaire, it has undergone four translations, has been introduced in editions by such distinguished figures as Jules Verne, Jules Romains, and Gaston Bachelard (P. Quinn French Face 170).

We must look beyond the statements about Pym itself in order to understand the scant domestic literary response. Two contextual frames deserve some scrutiny for the light they can shed on this: immediately, the problematic prevailing attitudes toward Poe during this period; and more broadly, the relationship of the work to the aesthetic values promulgated in the literary establishment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Poe's early reputation has been a subject of considerable study.¹² A number of Poe scholars have noted that early criticism as well as much late criticism has been affected by a failure to discriminate between the man and his work; what were perceived to be immoral stories and guilty or mentally unsound narrators were considered to be a direct extension of an authorial mind of the same qualities. This perception was reinforced by the persistent legend of Poe's personality and behavior. A French critic succinctly said in 1865 what most American commentators more or less held to be true: "Every study of the work of Edgar Poe should be preceded by a biographical note--a very short one--because it is indispensable to the understanding of this peculiar talent which is dominated and inundated by strangeness." His conclusion too, founded upon supposed biographical factors, distills a

type of American response that obtained more or less unchanged for a century: "[This analysis] can be summarized by saying...that Edgar Poe, as writer, is the product of alcohol and the mathematical spirit in a man of imagination of the Anglo-Saxon race" (Alexander 195).

From his death to mid-twentieth century, precious little was said about Poe's writing that was not charged in some way with moral assessment of Poe's behavior, personality, and circumstances. As we will see, this is not unique; morality in author and work alike were touchstones of nineteenth-century criticism. What is unique with Poe's case is the pitch, the degree of polarization, and the longevity of debate about Poe's place in literature. A number of causes for this have been adduced, most involving Poe himself and his social relations: his ignoble personal and professional reputations; the calumnious publication of his literary executor, Rufus Griswold; enmity built up between Poe and many other influential persons in the literary-publishing circles; and sectional prejudice in the heated decades preceding the Civil War. All of these were exacerbated by Poe's unsparing literary criticism of his contemporaries, and by the running, career-ending journalistic warfare which this often generated, and which ruined Poe himself professionally in 1846.¹³

While the 'Griswold factor' has tended to obscure the other factors, it would be difficult to overstate the effect a single man had upon the posthumous opinion of Poe, almost from the day he died. Of Poe obituaries, it was his, solicited by the New York Daily Tribune (October 9, 1849), that became the most widely known and taken as the most authoritative;¹⁴ and it was his forty-page "Memoir of the Author"

(1850) that became the official and sole biographical account for the next three decades, and primary source of the world's knowledge of Poe even beyond. Poe biography relied largely on Griswold, even after John H. Ingram revealed that Griswold had forged correspondence and fabricated "facts" in the 'memoir' in order to place Poe in the worst possible light (Miller 4).¹⁵

To command such authority, Griswold enjoyed a position no other individual had: he had known Poe personally; he was named, apparently by Poe himself, to be literary executor (A. Quinn 662-63), editing the standard collection of Poe's work (the vehicle for the "Memoir"); and he enjoyed a national reputation as one of the preeminent authorities in the literary world, on the strength of his numerous anthologies and biographies of American authors. One editor called him "the great Apollo of our literary heavens" (Daniel 358). What he did with this power is authorize some of the worst rumors and attitudes extant during Poe's life, and with his own slighting criticism, significantly shape the way others would read Poe for decades to come.

While Griswold offers many laudatory and discerning insights about Poe's style and originality in the "Memoir," it is dominated by the rich, vivid, villainous portrait of Poe, and the ways in which his character flaws are projected into his art. As Griswold put it, "Every genuine author...leaves in his works...traces of his personal character," and with Poe there was "a singular harmony."¹⁶ Three negative aspects of Poe reemerge time and again. First, Poe was a man with "no moral susceptibility": unreliable, "vicious" in his treatment of others, full of "self-conceit," and so pitifully "ambitious" that

"you could not speak of wealth, but his cheek paled with gnawing envy"; he was also a drunkard, an expellee from the University of Virginia, where he had "led a very dissipated life," an army deserter, and a habitual plagiarist "scarcely paralleled...in all literary history." His art follows: it is "without a recognition or a manifestation of conscience."

Secondly, Griswold imputes a sense of superficiality to Poe's mind, resulting in work that is imbued with qualities of sensationalism, shallowness and cheapness. Largely this is done by 'faint praise' for Poe as a facile master of effect, able to "drug the mind," rather than as a genuine or profound artist. Thus he praises the "analytical subtlety" in his "strange and spectral and revolting creations," and his "almost faultless" taste, which nonetheless "evinces little of the genuine feeling" that is necessary to "immortal verse."

Finally, what has had perhaps the most pernicious effect is the subtle suggestion throughout the 'memoir' that Poe is not only estranged from society by "harsh circumstances," but that he is somehow innately alien to humanity, a denizen of one of his own "weird" landscapes. It is worth quoting one paragraph at length:

He was at all times a dreamer—dwelling in ideal realms—in heaven or hell—peopled with the creatures and the accidents of his brain. He walked the streets, in madness or melancholy, with lips moving in indistinct curses, or with eyes upturned in passionate prayer, (never for himself, for he felt, or professed to feel, that he was already damned, but) for their happiness who at the moment were objects of his idolatry;—or,

with his glances introverted to a heart gnawed with anguish...
 he would speak as if to spirits that at such times only could
 be evoked by him from Aidenn, close by whose portals his
 disturbed soul sought [forgetfulness].... (56)

This passage contains elements of what would later crystallize into two variants of Poe: on one hand the insane genius (or pretender); and on the other, Poe as an alien in his own land, with a sensibility perhaps European, but certainly unamerican, as Van Wyc' Brooks would say in 1915, "having nothing in common with the world that produced him" (34). Taken together or separately, these three aspects were a kind of template from which an overwhelming number of portraits of Poe were drawn for the next century.

Griswold's attitude toward Poe and his work was echoed by other prominent voices in the years immediately following Poe's death, many of whom also had personal animus toward Poe.¹⁷ A number of the defenders of Poe who saw power, originality and genius in Poe's work qualified their praise with moral condemnation of Poe himself and his work, and therefore his literary rank.¹⁸ A considerable number of defenses of Poe and his work have been documented. It is important to note that those written by individuals who knew Poe—most notably Philadelphia editor George Graham, New York novelists Nathaniel Parker Willis and John Neal, and Boston's James Russell Lowell—vigorously defended Poe's moral integrity.¹⁹ Some defenders of Poe who experienced, or accepted others' testimony, of his unpredictability developed a kind of Jekyll-and-Hyde theory.²⁰ For instance, Willis, one of Poe's closest friends, knew him as "quiet, patient, industrious, and most

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gentlemanly." Yet he accepted Griswold's disparaging characterization to the point of quoting six paragraphs from Griswold's obituary in his own 1850 essay, attributing these traits to a 'side' of Poe Willis claims not to have seen, a "reverse phase" brought about by liquor (Carlson Recognition 37). Of Poe's work, Willis said in an earlier review that he was sure it "will long survive, as among the ablest and most remarkable of American productions" (Walker 263).

Of course not every early critic had known Poe, and not every critic who knew him injected personal or political interest. In a review of the Prose Romances (1843), critic Park Benjamin proclaimed "this gentleman as one of the best writers of the English language now living" (Walker 29). Longfellow, who could have hurt Poe badly for Poe's groundless accusations against him of plagiarism, spoke only in the highest terms of Poe's work and potential, if largely in private.²¹ (Poe's abuse of him may well have silenced public praise from that source.) He once wrote to Poe "I think you are destined to stand among the first romance-writers of the country, if such be your aim" (qtd. in A. Quinn 317). Similarly, Lowell's early enthusiasm for Poe was dampened by late accusations of plagiarism and harsh criticism of his own work. But his widely-read 1845 essay²² stands out for its detachment and moments of insightful analysis. It is diffuse and occasionally contradictory,²³ and therefore did not form a solid counterbalance to Griswold's essay. However the overall sense conveyed is that Poe possessed "the prime qualities of genius, a faculty of vigorous yet minute analysis, and a wonderful fecundity of imagination." He contradicts Griswold in crediting Poe's art with power and depth

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beyond "mere artifice," and suggests he will always hold "an individual eminence in our literature" (167). Interestingly, it was New England Universalist minister C. Chauncey Burr that reflected Poe's own critical principles in his 1852 estimate of Poe, precisely contradicting the one thing almost everyone else agreed on, that Poe was writing himself into his work:

That perfection of horror that abounds in his writings, has been unjustly attributed to some moral defect in the man. But I perceive not why the competent critic should fall into this error. Of all authors, ancient or modern, Poe has given us the least of himself in his works. He wrote as an artist [original emphasis]. (qtd. in A. Quinn 678)

Burr's critical acumen permitted seemingly twentieth-century insight in explaining why Poe was "the greatest artist among modern authors": "He probed the general psychological law, in its subtle windings through the mystic chambers of our being, as it was never probed before, until he stood in the very abyss of its centre, the sole master of its effect."

Other factors besides interpersonal experience shaped the nineteenth-century attitude toward Poe. Over the century as a whole, sectional conflict figures as a central element. Against the culturally-unifying tendency of the commercial and transportation transformation of the 1830's and 1840's, polarization over the slavery question produced North-South tensions that went from bad to inflamed over the course of Poe's professional life. Two key components of this equation were the long-lived dominance exerted by New England in the arts and cultural discourse; and, what particularly rankled southern

literary people (and none more than Poe), the moralistic and idealistic strains that characterized much of that discourse. Of course, these strains were then being revitalized by such forces of reform as the evangelical Great Revival, transcendentalism, the abolition cause. The results were often dogmatic, prejudicial attitudes.²⁴

While his southern roots did not help him win influence in Boston and other northern cities, the South did not provide him much compensatory support. Certainly he had ardent supporters among southern writers, such as Virginia novelist John Pendleton Kennedy, Baltimore novelist Philip Pendleton Cooke, Georgia poet Thomas Holley Chivers and South Carolina novelist William Gilmore Simms. And though each of these showed themselves willing to assist a friend and fellow Southerner, as he progressively became more embroiled in legal and financial difficulty in northern cities, their support was limited by several factors, both before and after his death. In several cases, their correspondence indicates dwindling enthusiasm, as they had no reason to disbelieve every disreputable account circulated by Poe's enemies.²⁵ Moreover, as Hubbell indicates, Poe was not vigorously defended for southern literature by the South as others were because, in a period of polemical rhetoric, Poe rarely wrote about the South or issues of concern to Southerners (American Writers 108).

But those that did seek to help him were also limited by circumstances. There was no powerful southern literary clique or coterie, like that of Boston or that emerging in New York around Clark and Duyckinck and the large, capital-rich publishing firms. Except for Richmond's Southern Literary Messenger, (and that only because of Poe's

work as assistant editor in the mid-thirties), Richmond and Baltimore lacked publishing, commercial, and educational institutions with the national prestige and reach enjoyed by those of the big northern cities.

New England dominance was neither partial or ephemeral. When Poe was writing, almost all the writers with anything like a national reputation were of New England, except Irving and Cooper, while none were of the South, a pattern that would continue until well after the Civil War.²⁶ When Howells said in 1902 that "The great New Englanders would none of him [Poe]," he was speaking of Lowell, Longfellow, Emerson, James, etc., but he could have said the same of lesser names who, in the aggregate, wield their own kind of power. The New England literary historians, critics, editors, and anthologists were more widely read than those of any other region, and remained highly respected long after New York achieved a more dominant role in the national literary market. They had little room in their publications for southern writers, and even less for a hostile southerner whose art and critical theory was alien in many respects to their own.²⁷

Winters complained in 1937 that Poe "has been pretty effectually established as a great writer while we have been sleeping." Whether the major critical figures to that time were, with Winters, sleeping, Poe was indeed established, by the efforts of a number of marginal voices. In 1902 Eugene Didier seems to be the first to mention a 'Poe cult,' and suggests that it had its origins in the unveiling of the monument to Poe in Baltimore in 1875. In 1885 Edmund Clarence Stedman referred to this as well, a counterforce to those who saw in Poe's writings nothing but "the false and insincere." He describes this "sentimental" criticism as

a "chorus of indiscriminate praise [that] has grown so loud as to really to be an ill omen for his fame" (226). More useful for that fame were items such as the Englishman John H. Ingram's biography, the first that can be called scholarly (though it idealizes Poe as almost a saint and martyr), Woodberry's biographical work (Edgar Allan Poe [1885], expanded into the two-volume Life in 1909 [rpt. 1965], the standard until Arthur H. Quinn's), and Woodberry and Stedman's own textual scholarship in co-editing their Collected Works (1894-95), and Stedman's critical statements, most notably the influential essay on Poe in Poets of America of 1885 (226). In 1907 two landmark literary histories appeared, one of America and the other a history and collection of Southern literature. Though neither mentions Pym, both provide extensive, thoughtful recognition of Poe's contribution, Charles Kent's essay in the latter including a "plea for ungrudging recognition" of "one of the chief glories of the literature of our nation." One of the most widely-used anthologies of the turn-of-the-century holds Poe, along with Whitman, "above all other poets."²⁸

Poe was not admitted into the Hall of Fame of Great Americans in its first two elections at New York University in 1900 and 1905. But he was in 1910, the year after his centenary (Hubbell, American Writers 94-95). Bibliographies reveal a surge of interest and materials on Poe in the centenary, while the treatments of Poe in most works about American literature by even those unsympathetic to Poe's writing reveal that he was becoming indisputably a major American writer, whatever his merits or demerits. Major spokesmen, such as Brownell, Vernon L. Parrington, and Norman Foerster, and major writers, such as James and

Eliot, continued to speak rarely and largely disparagingly, but with a growing sense of respect for status conferred by voices around the margins of American 'belles lettres' that could not forever be ignored: Poe's ever-expanding domestic readership; writers and critics from overseas, who testified, especially from France, to his influence and regard there;²⁹ biographers and textual scholars of Poe, such as James Harrison, Killis Campbell, Margaret Alterton, and Olive T. Mabbott (in addition to the earlier contributions of Ingram, Stedman, and Woodberry.) Younger American critics promoting a more open and diverse canon were also more receptive. Finally, and perhaps most significantly for Poe studies, a many domestic poets have been particularly drawn to Poe, from Vachel Lindsay, Hart Crane, Robinson, and William C. Williams, to Tate, Wilbur, and Auden. Until mid-century, perhaps only D. H. Lawrence, in Studies in Classic American Literature (1923), and critic Edmund Wilson ("Poe at Home and Abroad," 1926) spoke with a resonance to rival the largely detractive voices of James and Eliot.

Many of the principal early architects of an American literary and cultural history were working to a large extent within the New England canon, and the assumption that American culture was an outgrowth of New England. Frequently they reiterated, echoed and developed in more sophisticated dress Griswold's characterization of Poe, and the biographically-oriented method of Poe criticism that he instituted. Norman Foerster, in his landmark American Criticism (1928), considered Poe's problem to be morality: he "lacked interest in humanity," and the result is deficient art: he was "unmoral and unphilosophical in his poems and tales because he was himself unmoral and unphilosophical."

In America Coming of Age (1915), Van Wyck Brooks describes Poe's work as "sinister" and "hysterical" (32-33).

In Main Currents of American Thought Vernon Parrington reiterates the idea that Poe was a sort of intellectual alien, and a bizarre genius. He was at odds with "every major interest of the New England renaissance," and with "Jacksonian America" as a whole. As a man who "aside from his art...had no philosophy and no programs and no causes," he was "outside the mainstream." Citing the old list of behavioral irregularities, he delegates "the problem of Poe" to "abnormal psychology" and the study of his work to "the belletrist" (55-6).

A principle charge in the early twentieth century was that Poe's work was vulgar, sensational, and shallow; that, as James put it, "to take [Poe] with more than a certain degree of seriousness is to lack seriousness one's self." He remarked, in 1887, that "an enthusiasm for Poe is the mark of a decidedly primitive stage of reflection.... [but he was] a charlatan" (Carlson Essays 82). Winters attempts to show that both Poe's practice and theory of art will preclude it from art's richest function. As Winters understands Poe's "The Poetic Principle," beauty, the proper subject of art, exists not in this world, but in eternity, where the artist seems to transport us by manipulation and "a kind of emotional delusion." However, says Winters, this is confusing "the subject and the style of poetry." To treat beauty as the subject of poetry gives "an air of mystery, of strangeness," but is ultimately trivial, and "can be of no aid to us in understanding ourselves or in ordering our lives, for most of our experience is irrelevant to it" (Carlson Recognition 185).

T. S. Eliot's most extensive public statement about Poe was his 1949 centenary address at the Library of Congress. Here he offered a qualified appreciation of Poe's rich influence on French poetry. If he earlier regarded Poe's writing as "slipshod," "Peurile," and "unscrupulous," as he suggests, now he cautiously elaborates what he thought these poets "saw" in Poe: he indicates the "incantatory element" in the poetry; and he notes "the variety of form of expression," in a body of work in which they nevertheless found an "essential unity," where Anglo critics perceived dabbling and fragmentation. He credits Baudelaire with appreciating a formalist critical principle the English world had only recently recognized, that "the goal of poetry is of the same nature as its principle, and that it should have nothing in view but itself" (205, 209, 215).

Pym and Early Poe Scholarship

Few of the attitudes about Poe's writing and Poe's place in our literature up until mid-century explicitly involved Pym. The few discussions are almost entirely from those projects in which the speaker was necessarily offering a comprehensive treatment of Poe's writing: commentary accompanying collected works editions, biographies, and, rarely, American literary histories. Griswold devotes one paragraph to Pym in his "Memoir," damning it with the faint praise that it is "not without some sort of merit," though he is not specific. As an imitation of well-known realistic narratives such as Robinson Crusoe, it lacks the "pleasing interests" of these, and its failure is a result of Poe's "tendency to extravagance...the most striking infirmity of his genius"

(52). John M. Daniel, of the Richmond Examiner, wrote an emotional, almost hysterical essay in 1850, assailing Poe for wasting "creative faculties" that, but for a profligate life, might have given him a stature comparable to "the Miltons, the Shakespeares." Instead, his poetry is "execrably bad," his prose generally the product of "want and dyspepsia... and blue devils." Nonetheless, on the strength of a few "gems" he did produce, one of which is Pym, "no other American has half the chance of remembrance in the history of literature." He suggests that "Among those terrible scenes, and in strange descriptions of undiscovered islands and unknown savages, the temper and genius of this author revel undisturbed." He judges the final pages to be among the most "remarkable ... passages in all of Poe's writings," and calls the work "unjustly disparaged and neglected" (Walker 374).

Key literary histories that treat Poe either ignore Pym, most prominently Barrett's and Brownell's, or treat it in passing. Leon Vincent in American Literary Masters (1906) describes it in a paragraph, noting that "only at rare intervals does Poe's peculiar genius flash out." William Simonds' A Student's History of American Literature (1909) praises Poe's work as "characterized by an exquisite alliance of poetry and music," resulting in a "perfection of form," and has a higher view of Pym. If parts are "morbid" and "offensive," nonetheless "his poetic imagination asserts itself in wonderful descriptions of unknown lands and the mysterious white sea" (211). Surprisingly, histories of the American novel largely ignored Pym until about the nineteen-eighties. An earlier exception is Alexander Cowie's Rise of the American Novel (1948). In a four page analysis, including a summary, suggestions for

several sources, and critical remarks, he argues that, taken on its own terms, "one may allow [Pym] a great deal of merit." Its unique, "loose" structure properly understood, Pym can be taken as a series of episodes much as Poe suggests that Paradise Lost is properly read as "a series of minor poems," as Poe says in "The Poetic Principle" (Poe Essays 71). Thus Pym does not necessarily violate his own stated principles of unity of effect and brevity in an artistic work. Cowie goes on to compare the work favorably to the rest of his work: "It contains passages as gripping as Poe ever wrote, details as carefully capitalized as any in his best short stories, imaginative effects seldom equalled by Poe elsewhere in prose or verse" (302)

Prior to Cowie's analysis, there is little besides the brief, factual accounts of biographers. Even respected Poe scholar Killis Campbell had no interpretive statements to make about Pym in his lengthy essay in the Cambridge History of American Literature (1917), or in any of his studies compiled in The Mind of Poe (1933). As Cowie suggested, Pym seemed an "embarrassment" to Poe critics. But perhaps also because this period of Poe's life is the least documented, and has always been the least known. During that year in New York, from February, 1837 to sometime in the summer of 1838, he seems to have written very little besides the latter portion of Pym. Unable to make a living there, in a year of economic depression, he departed with his family to Philadelphia. Quinn's 750-page biography devotes only two pages to that period, in addition to two pages of factual description and excerpts of Pym.

The meager facts now accepted about the composition and publication

of Pym are basically the same as those pieced together by John H. Ingram in 1880, and the same that appear in the principal biographies since: George Woodberry's Edgar Allan Poe (1885) and Life (1909), James A. Harrison's Life and Letters (1903), Hervey Allen's Israfel (1926), Mary E. Phillips' Edgar Allan Poe, the Man (1926), and Arthur H. Quinn's. Those facts are as follows: that Poe began Pym in Baltimore in late 1836 or early 1837 as a serial for the Messenger, which published two installments in January and February numbers. Fired by editor Thomas White in January, he completed it in New York over the next several months. Harper & Brothers accepted it, with the recommendation of James Kirk Paulding, announced it in May, copyrighted the title on June 10, 1837, and published it late July, 1838³⁰.

The few documents that shed light on Poe's intentions and opinion regarding the work have not grown from the several relevant letters first printed in Harrison's and Woodberry's biographies: first, Harper & Brothers' June, 1836 letter to Poe explaining their rejection of his manuscript Tales of the Folio Club. In it Poe was advised that "Readers in this country have a decided and strong preference for works (especially fiction) in which a single and connected story occupies the whole volume" (Harrison 17:35-36); and secondly, an 1840 letter from Poe to William Burton, in which he called Burton's vitriolic review--virtually a tirade--of Pym "essentially correct," and Pym itself "a very silly book." But there may well be an element of face-saving here, as the lengthy letter is a defensive response to what Poe called an "insulting" letter from Burton (which we do not have.) He may have wished to trivialize his personal investment in a book regarded as a

critical and commercial failure. Moreover, he also said in that context "you will find yourself puzzled in judging me by ordinary motives" (Woodberry 242-247). The nature of Poe's composition of and intention for Pym has largely been a matter of inference and speculation, and will be dealt with in chapter four in the context of studies that devote attention to this. None of the biographies mentioned, and in fact no biography I have examined prior to Julian Symond's The Tell-Tale Heart (1978), offers substantive criticism. The otherwise highly-laudatory Ingram had no praise for Pym, and considered it "unfinished" work. Harrison emphasized Poe's dependence upon other sources, and dismissed it as hardly original work, "equal parts Poe, 'The Ancient Mariner,' and Morell" (133); Woodberry regarded it as a "journalistic enterprise" designed to capitalize upon the current popularity of sea tales and interest in the south seas (190); and even Quinn, one of the most sympathetic of the biographers, implicitly dismisses it as a significant work by saying only that the final image of the mysterious white figure will stay with the reader, "stimulating the imagination" (266).

Pym's Impact on James and Eliot

Yet if the major spokesmen had little to say about Pym, still, as a piece of the literary heritage that concerned them, it asserted a peculiar presence. It made a lasting impression on James' imagination, as evidenced in its recurrence in two prefaces and a novel. Early in The Golden Bowl, Prince Amerigo recalls a "wonderful tale...of the shipwrecked Gordon Pym" he had read as a child. He has been pondering the "element of the impenetrable" in people's motives, specifically Mrs.

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Assingham's in arranging his marriage, and he seizes upon a moment in Pym as a kind of metaphor: drifting toward the pole, Pym "found at a given moment before him a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as darkness conceals, yet of the colour of milk or snow. There were moments when he felt his own boat move upon some such mystery" (James, Golden, 256-257). In his preface to his collection of ghost stories, he refers to a failing in Pym in order to make a related point about the presentation of "prodigies," "strange encounters," or "phenomena," in fiction. They must be filtered through a consciousness, a character's "history" in order to interest us.

Intrinsic values they have none—as we feel for instance in such a matter as the would-be portentuous climax of Edgar Poe's 'Arthur Gordon Pym' where the indispensable history is absent, where the phenomena evoked, the moving accidents, coming straight, as I say, are immediate and flat, and the attempt is all at the horrific in itself. The result is that, to my sense, the climax fails...for want of connexions....our own further relation to the elements...hang in the void."

(Art 256)

In her 1978 essay "James Corrects Poe: The Appropriation of Pym in The Golden Bowl," Adeline Tintner suggests that these interrelated references go to the thematic heart of James' novel, noting that his original title for the novel had been Mystification, the title of a Poe tale. Introducing the 'moment' in Pym's climax in the opening of the novel, James both "corrects" it, passing it through the consciousness of

Amerigo, and uses it as a template that has recurring relevance in human relationships throughout the novel.

Poe remained as much an enigma for Eliot as he did for James--as he would say in a lecture toward the end of his life, "an enigma, a stumbling block." For all his European influence, he could think of no English-speaking poet who has been sensibly influenced by Poe; his work suggests "the intellect of a gifted young person before puberty." At the same time he noted "one cannot be sure that one's own writing has not been influenced by Poe" (Carlson Recognition 205). Eliot evokes Pym when he describes Poe's "pre-adolescent delights": "wonders of nature and of mechanics and of the supernatural, cryptograms and cyphers, puzzles and labyrinths, and wild flights of speculation." Yet he credits Pym as a foundation-stone in a rich Anglo-American genealogy, the adventure romance in the line of Rider Haggard and H. G. Wells, all of which "too few" read today. For all its childishness, Pym seems to have had an effect on Eliot similar to that which he credits the poetry as having on the French: "because of its very crudity, [it] stirs the feelings at a deep and almost primitive level." This is evident, not in any lengthy comment on the book, but in the fact that images of Pym's voyage are evoked in a lengthy, nautical narrative in the ur-text of The Waste Land, prior to the collaborative revision of Eliot and Pound.³¹ Excised only at Pound's insistence, the seventy-two line narrative recounts a shipwreck at the foot of Mount Purgatory, at the South Pole, and a voyage towards it which is as haunting, doomed, and relentless as Pym's: As they approach the pole, the ominous, white sea-scape resembles that of Pym:

Something which we knew must be a dawn--

A different darkness flowed above the clouds,
 And dead ahead we saw, where sky and sea should meet,
 A line, a white line, a long white line,
 A wall, a barrier, toward which we drove.³²

It is possible to understand this image as suggesting a vast mountain at Poe's pole, as well as Dante's and Eliot's: "The summit of the cataract was utterly lost in the dimness and the distance."

4

Morality and Nineteenth-Century Aesthetics

We have sought to understand the silence on Pym between the time of its reviews and the mid-twentieth century by situating the book in the context of disapprobation of Poe. To complete this etiology, we need to step back further and analyze the aesthetic values which shaped the culture. The notion that writing is an extension of the writer was, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a fundamental assumption of criticism, a heritage of Romantic poetics. For the romantics, as M. H. Abrams formulated it, "a work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings." The authorial subject becomes not just the impetus of the process, but the implicit center of the product itself. "The primary source and subject matter of a poem,

therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind," which form "both the artistic product and the criteria by which it is to be judged" (21-22).

Catherine Belsey's term "expressive realism" for the predominant mode of literary discourse in the nineteenth century is a useful one, combining the expressive theory articulated by Abrams and the Aristotelian function of mimesis, dominating the neoclassical period and continuing as a basic aesthetic value. Both authentic expression of the author and representation of the world were taken for granted as possible as well as desirable. "To understand the text [in the expressive realist attitude] is to explain it in terms of the author's ideas, psychological state or social background." Consequently during this period, and as Belsey observes, continuing to the present, "the commonest way to write about literature is to write a book about an author, analysing his or her works chronologically to show the developing skill with which the author's developing insights are expressed" (13).

The coherence of author and character into a single, stable subject in turn has ideological significance. As Belsey argues, "The work of ideology is to present the position of the subject as fixed and unchangeable, an element in a given system of differences which is human nature and the world of human experience" (90). In each act of reading, the reader does the conflating, constituting the subject into a coherent consciousness. In the process, the reader becomes implicated not just in the text, but in the subject, constructed through his or her consciousness.

In the American Renaissance, few cultural facts can be said to have exerted greater pressure on literary discourse than the moral imperative. Though certainly tied closely with English Romanticism, imaginative and critical writing in the Renaissance had deep roots in colonial America, including and especially the Puritan culture of New England. But in all sections, Protestantism was among the preeminent defining cultural forces, shaping discourse in form and aim long after its power had begun to wane. Paramount among these aims was the obligation of moral edification. Poe stated clearly this assumption in "The Poetic Principle," and then pledged his career to its eradication: "It has been assumed, tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the ultimate end of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged....We Bostonians, very especially, have developed [this idea] in full." This "heresy of the didactic," as he coined it, has "corrupt[ed] our Poetical Literature [more] than all its other enemies combined" (Essays 75). More sympathetically, and typically, Rufus W. Griswold explains the normative principle by which aesthetic value is subordinate to and grounded in moral value: "Seated behind the intelligence, and directing it, according to its capacities, conscience is the parent of whatever is absolutely and unquestionably beautiful in art as well as in conduct" (55).

As Michael Bell, Cathy Davidson, and others have documented, the imputation of truth and duty upon writing led to suspicion and a good deal of anxiety about fiction itself, which could, almost by its definition, flout both. Fiction, whether sensational journalism or

novels, was thought to be a threat both to the individual and to the social order. Thomas Jefferson, to take but a single example, reflects in an 1818 letter the kind of anxiety many felt about the rapid growth and dissemination of fiction: "When this poison infects the mind, it destroys its tone and revolts against wholesome reading.... The result is a bloated imagination, sickly judgment, and disgust towards all the real business of life" (qtd. in Bell "Arts" 7).

Not even socially acceptable until almost the end of the eighteenth century, when novels did come to be in high demand, novelists and publishers still sought to obscure the fictional aspect. As Cathy Davidson notes,

until well into the nineteenth century, virtually every American novel somewhere in its preface or its plot defended itself against the charge that it was a novel, either by defining itself differently ("Founded in Truth") or by redefining the genre tautologically as all those things it was presumed not to be--moral, truthful, educational, and so forth. (40)³³

The cultural context, then, can provide a basis for understanding this aspect of the American literary establishment's seemingly puzzling reception of Poe and Pym: there is nothing unique in the fact that most criticism of Poe's writing was shaped or augmented by discussion of his life; nor is it unusual that moral evaluation weighed into most discussions. Such is the case at least as much with the defenders of Poe's work as those who took issue with it.

In his study of the American romance Bell demonstrates the

ambivalence with which each of the major writers faced their role, a dual role balancing the moral duty of authorship with the subversive potential of their medium. Only Poe unambiguously made, as James later called it, the "sacrifice of relation" between poetry and truth/duty. Underlying both his theory and artistic practice is the notion of an autonomous imaginative authority, conceptually disinterested. In his essay "The Poetic Principle," this is the principle. Poe thus becomes the first and preeminent theorist to advance Kantian aesthetic theory in America, particularly the concept of the aesthetic sense as an autonomous category.³⁴ He defines it in "The Poetic Principle": "An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odours, and sentiments amid which he exists" (76). The "moral sense" and the "pure intellect," source of truth-perception, are distinct from the sense of the beautiful, and require distinct forms of discourse: "The demands of truth are severe. She has no sympathy with the myrtles. All that which is so indispensable in Song, is precisely all that with which she has nothing whatever to do" (76). The apprehension of beauty, then, is the only proper aim of a poem. If "we look into our own souls, we should...discover that under the sun there exists [nothing]...more dignified--more supremely noble than this very poem...this poem which is a poem and nothing more--this poem written solely for the poem's sake" (75-76).³⁵

For our purpose, we need say no more about Poe's criticism here, accept to note that his practice accords with his theory. Clearly many

of the early critics were blind to the fact that moral issues are insinuated throughout Poe's work. At the same time, as many did recognize, the works are not oriented upon an axis of moral closure, or upon any conventional approach to morality. To be sure, the criminal may pay for his crime by his psychic anguish (as in "The Black Cat") or by legal punishment ("The Tell-Tale Heart"; "The Cask of Amontillado"). The crime and its consequences may even make a story superficially resemble a moral fable. Indeed, numerous characters--Egeus ("Berenice"), Usher, William Wilson, Ligeia's husband--seem to confirm Jefferson's and others' warnings against fiction and other 'bad' habits: they all suffer from a nervous, melancholic condition brought on by overly-stimulating or gloomy reading, excessive "meditation," or too little fresh air. Yet Poe's ironic treatments of both morality and reason constitute anything but a conventional approach, in the sense that their end is to confirm moral compensation.

For instance, a number of the stories and poems rather surreptitiously draw the reader into the perspective of an irrational subject, in a narrative that proffers no obvious objective lesson, but seems, scandalously, to luxuriate in the subjective distortion or despair (e.g., "Berenice," "Ulalume"). As a second example, the apparently rational and moral perspectives of other narrators, such as those of "Usher," the Dupin stories, and even Pym, prove inadequate to penetrate beneath surfaces, and perhaps, as a number of critics contend, betray a deep psychic disturbance (e.g., Barbour 65-66).

Without attempting to analyze Poe's treatment of morality,³⁶ we can note that James Gargano was the first to identify a fundamental

faulty assumption in the bulk of Poe criticism up to the "present" (1963): the failure to recognize the ironic structure of the tales, especially the distance between the author and his characters, in terms of personality and verbal expression:

[Poe] often so designs his tales as to show his narrators' limited comprehension of their own problems and states of mind; the structure of many of Poe's stories clearly reveals an ironical and comprehensive intelligence critically and artistically ordering events so as to establish a vision of life and character which the narrator's inadequacies help to "prove." (165)

Finally, whether Poe's literature is moral, amoral, or immoral in any sense speaks less to the issue than how readers of the nineteenth century perceived it. It is clear that of the varied nature of Griswold's attacks upon Poe, it was the charge of personal immorality that most bothered Poe's nineteenth-century defenders. This is not only true of those personal friends, such as Sarah Helen Whitman and Thomas H. Chivers, whose principle aim was to defend his moral integrity and decency, but of those coming after who argued for his artistic integrity. To the nineteenth-century reader, in general, artistic integrity was inconceivable without moral accounting. Similarly, those who sought to assign Poe's work the lowest grade of merit did so by reiterating charges of immorality, or, effectively the same, a tainted genius. Critics of that era who qualify Poe's genius as "analytical," "mechanical," or "brilliant and dazzling, but with no heat," as Whitman

put it, are suggesting a genius dissevered from the moral, and from humanity itself. Some extend this logic by implicitly ascribing to Poe's work the kind of autonomous, illicit creation of a Satan, a Comus, or a Prospero. Van Wyck Brooks is one who is explicit, describing his "genius" as an "intelligence in and for itself felt to be a maleficent force"; his work is "an orchid made out of chemicals. Magic is always so. It has the sinister quality of a force operating outside nature, without any relation to human values" (32-33).

Notes

¹There has been no hard evidence discovered to back the persistent biographical claims that in England "the rural readers are said to have been taken in" by the "hoax," as Hervey Allen claimed as late as 1926 (Allen 2:419). In "Contemporary Reviews," Pollin discredits one source, cited by Woodberry in his 1909 biography, the memoir of George H. Putnam, son of Pym's initial British publisher (47).

²All presently known American and British reviews are reproduced in at least one of several accessible sources: Pollin's three articles, in 1974, 1975, and 1978, one by J. Don Vann, and items 15-25 of I. M. Walker. In The Poe Log, Dwight Thomas quotes from a number of known sources, and from one previously unknown review.

³See for instance Morison, The Oxford History of the American People vol. 2, pp. 214-233; Polanyi, The Great Transformation; Charvat, Literary Publishing in America 1790-1850.

⁴For example, the technological advance, in the cylinder press, mechanized cloth binding, and the railroad; the exponential increase in investment capital and banking, in its effect on the size of publishing operations; the growth of literacy to 90% of adults by mid-century, in a population that itself increased three-fold during those years, to 32 million by 1860.

⁵For a discussion of the contemporary response to "Hans Pfaall," see Pollin Imaginary 373-75.

⁶Text in Pollin Imaginary 388.

⁷James Riley, Authentic Narrative of the Loss of the American Brig Commerce (1817, rpt. five times).

⁸Like William Burton and several others, the reviewer takes Poe to task for his description of the Ariel, which, having lost its mast and mainsail in a storm, was running "under the jib only" (see 5.1). As a sloop, the Ariel would have a single mast, the loss of which would mean the loss of all sails, including the jib.

⁹A reference to the United States Surveying and Exploring Expedition, under Captain Charles Wilkes, which departed June, 1838, and was commissioned to explore the South Seas, including the polar region.

¹⁰Edgartown, corrupted by Poe to "Edgarton," is a port on Martha's Vineyard, not Nantucket (1.1).

¹¹Graham's Magazine of Philadelphia, which had employed Poe in 1841-42, printed a brief review, largely summary.

¹²See Walker, Carlson Essays, Moss Battles, A. Quinn, Nakamura.

¹³See Moss Battles for the best account of the principle battles.

¹⁴Reprinted in full in Carlson Recognition 28-35.

¹⁵Woodberry, Campbell, and A. H. Quinn successively discovered a greater extent.

¹⁶Carlson, Essays 57, 55. Difficult to obtain in entirety, see Carlson's excerpt (52-58) (containing most of the references in the following paragraphs), and analysis and summary in A. H. Quinn (668-676), Campbell (74-78), and Nakamura (104-110).

¹⁷In New York, poet and editor Thomas Dunn English, novelist and publisher Charles Briggs, with whom Poe had worked on Briggs' Broadway Journal, and editor Lewis Gaylord Clark, who in the Knickerbocker provided hostile reviews of Poe's works and attacks on his character that exceeded Griswold's in vituperation, to name a few from just one city.

¹⁸George Ripley, who never met Poe, praises his "extraordinary boldness and originality," analyzing Poe's powers in short fiction, but closely paraphrases passages of Griswold for his account of Poe's character and motives, and for the final assessment of his writing. While Poe might have attained "an eminent rank in literature," "unhappily he had no earnestness of character...no devotion to high purpose,--not even the desire to produce a consummate work of art,--and hence his writings fail of appealing to universal principles of taste, and are destitute of truth and naturalness" (334). Evert A. Duyckinck, for instance, New York editor and critic, acted as his literary agent on several occasions, and praised Poe's work "as specimens of subtle dialectics, and the anatomy of the heart" that "evinced a quickness of apprehension, an intensity of feeling, a vigor of imagination, a power of analysis, which are rarely seen." But after their relationship turned sour, he merely echoed Griswold, in his own obituary essay: Poe "lived entirely apart from the solidities and realities of life....[H]is writings [were] without the glow and pulse of humanity" (337).

¹⁹Lowell is an exception, largely confining his remarks to the work, and rather noncommittal on the man himself.

²⁰Philip Young traces a 'Jekyll-and-Hyde' line of psychological criticism (445-6).

²¹Scholars agree Poe's accusations were unfounded, and the inflammatory exchanges between Poe from the New York Mirror and Broadway Journal and defenders of Longfellow were calculated by him, probably to create a stir and sell copies. For the best account of this 'battle' see Moss Battles ch. 5.

²²Griswold included this essay, revised by Lowell, along with his own "Memoir" in his Works.

²³For instance, he says both that "As a critic he has shown [a] superior...ability," and "As a critic, Mr. Poe was aesthetically deficient" (Carlson, Recognition 15, 16).

²⁴Poe was prone to refer to transcendentalism, for instance, as a virus that can "infect" a promising young author, or Boston as a "vortex of mysticism" that can pull him in (Poe, Essays 292); and thus Emerson could describe southerners, as he did in 1837, as barely "more civilized than the Seminoles," and advise that the proper way to communicate with them is to say "'Fiddle-Faddle,' in answer to every solemn remark about 'The South'" (qtd. in Hubbell, South 127). Even a hundred years later a respected literary historian from the North could still flatly state that "in the Old South creative living and creative speech were alike impossible" (Lewisohn 78).

²⁵For example, see Moss Battles 235, and A. H. Quinn Passim.

²⁶Jay Hubbel (American Writers esp. chs. 2 & 4) analyzes the evolution of the New England canon, consisting of the 'schoolroom poets,' and several fiction writers (Hawthorne, Stowe), essayists (Emerson, Holmes), and historians (Bancroft, Parkman, Prescott.) By the 1880's, as publishing and consumption patterns indicate, even the South accepted this New England canon as national, despite the abolitionist activism of a number of that group. As some lost prestige in the post-Civil War decades, they were replaced by other New Englanders, such as Thoreau, Howells, and James. In the meantime, those reputations that survived--Longfellow, Lowell, Emerson, Hawthorne--became colossal, subordinating until well into the twentieth century non-New Englanders that we now place in the first rank, including among others Poe, Melville, and Whitman, all of whom did their major work at mid-century.

²⁷For example, Griswold's first edition of The Poets and Poetry of America, published in 1842 before animosity had developed, included only three poems by Poe, while his Prose Writers of America (1847) included no southerner. New England's Edwin Whipple, widely regarded as the preeminent American critic in the late nineteenth century, said little about Poe, granting him "original capacity," but pronouncing him "cursed by an incurable perversity of character" (qtd. in Hubbell, American Writers 37). Thomas Wentworth Higginson thought Poe's criticism worthless and his fiction "broken and disfigured by all sorts of inequalities and imitation and stucco," the result of "a propensity to disguise and falsify, to claim knowledge he did not possess, to invent quotations and references." He contrasts the fiction with Hawthorne's "solid masonry," and Poe's "want of true integrity" with Hawthorne's "austere virtue," the "best soil of genius" (Carlson, Recognition 76). Poe fared no better in most of the early literary histories. Granted originality and usually "genius," the praise is qualified, the discussion usually brief. American Literary Masters (1906), while giving Poe a full chapter, typically describes him as "impulsive," "perverse," "malevolent," etc., and defines his "genius [as] essentially journalistic," his work written without awareness of "the influence his

paragraphs will produce the week after next" (Vincent 199, 201). In his widely read and influential American Prose Masters (1909), William C. Brownell dismisses Poe's work as artificial and sensational. "The cult of Poe is not in the interest of literature, since as literature his writings are essentially valueless."

²⁸Barrett Wendell, A Literary History of America (1900); eds. Edwin Anderson Alderman, et. al., Library of Southern Literature v. 9, p. 908); ed. Curtis Hidden Page, The Chief American Poets (1905).

²⁹Most prominently Swinburne (1875), Shaw (1919), Lawrence (1923), and George Saintsbury (1933); Mallarmé (1876, 1883), Valéry (1921), and Marie Bonaparte (1933); and Dostoevsky (1861). See Carlson, Recognition and Critical Essays; for others, see Alexander.

³⁰For further discussion of these facts and the few documents that yield them, see chapter four below.

³¹Harry Levin first suggested Pym as a source (Memories 42).

³²Compare to Pym:

The range of vapour to the southward had arisen prodigiously in the horizon, and began to assume more distinctness in form. I can liken it to nothing but a limitless cataract, rolling silently into the sea from some immense and far-distant rampart in the heaven. The gigantic curtain ranged along the the whole extent of the southern horizon...A sullen darkness now hovered above us. (25:12-13)

³³For discussion of censure of fiction in early America, see Charvat, Origins, esp. chs 2, 7; Bell, Development, esp. ch. 1; Cathy Davidson, esp. ch. 3.

³⁴Poe's knowledge of Kantian theory was filtered through his reading of the French Enlightenment philosopher Victor Cousins, whose writings on aesthetics were drawn essentially unaltered from Kant's Critique of Judgment. At present, there is no indication that Poe read Kant directly.

³⁵The same principle informs the "Analytic of the Beautiful," the first book of Kant's Critique of Judgment. Briefly,

In order to distinguish whether anything is beautiful or not, we refer the representation, not by the understanding to the object for cognition, but by the imagination (perhaps in conjunction with the understanding) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or pain. The judgment of taste is therefore not a judgment of cognition, and is consequently not logical but aesthetical, by which we understand that whose determining ground can be no other than subjective (sc 1, 379).

Section four contrasts this with "satisfaction" "bound up with interest":

Whatever by means of reason pleases through the mere concept is good. That which pleases only as a means we call good for something (the useful), but that which pleases for itself if good in itself. In both there is always involved the concept of a purpose, and consequently the relation of reason to the (at least possible) volition, and thus a satisfaction in the presence of an object or an action, i.e. some kind of interest (380).

³⁶This is the aim, in whole or part, of studies too numerous to name here. However, it is a special concern of Thompson in Poe's Fiction.

Chapter Three

"A Language from the Depths": Psychological Models

1

Context

The biographically-oriented criticism that characterized the first hundred years of Poe commentary did not come to an end with the emergence of New Critical scholarship. Rather it continued in the form of psychoanalysis, extending in its initial phase the same logic that the key to understanding Poe's work was Poe himself, with particular reference to mental soundness. In a literary culture that was slow to embrace psychoanalysis, Poe early became, and remains, the most popular subject for psychoanalytic criticism. Poe biography became psychobiography in the early twentieth century, either incorporating psychoanalytic insights, such as Hervey Allen's Israfel: The Life and Times of Edgar Allan Poe (1926) and N. Bryllion Fagin's The Histrionic Mr. Poe (1949), or outright psychoanalyses of Poe, including John W. Robertson's Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychological Study (1922), Joseph Wood Krutch's Edgar Allan Poe: A Study in Genius (1926), Marie Bonaparte's Edgar Poe: Etude psychoanalytique (1933, translated in 1949 as The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation), and D. M. Rein's Edgar Allan Poe: The Inner Pattern (1960).

The studies of Pym that fit within the rubric of a psychological approach are wide-ranging, including any reading that perceives Pym's voyage as a symbolic projection of some inward, mental journey. The subject of analysis may be Poe himself, or the text, for the psychic types and laws that are at work within it. Pym may be 'psychoanalyzed' as if he were Poe, as if he had his own individuality and psyche, or as if he were an archetype representing universal human experience. The outward journey may be seen as a dream, a ritualistic journey of initiation, a voyage to death and the afterworld, down to the underworld, or back to the womb, or simply a fictive rather than metaphorical journey across the world as a field against which psychic laws work out the subject's destiny--or of course as some combination of these. In any case, an ulterior reality is envisioned, one which ultimately refers to the psyche. Despite frequent treatment elsewhere as a separate category, even Jungian-organized myth readings are built on fundamental psychoanalytic principles, as was Jung's archetypal theory itself.

Throughout this apparent diversity, we find that these studies are most naturally organized in relation to psychoanalysis, in which plot is seen as driven by some kind of psychic determinism of author or character that accords with Freud's structure. The most important is French psychoanalyst Marie Bonaparte's Life and Works, translated in 1949. To say, as Douglass Robinson does, that all subsequent readings of Pym were "reaction to or expansion of her reading" for the subsequent decade is certainly an overstatement ("Reading" 48). Studies by Harry Levin, Sydney Kaplan and Edward Davidson stand out even today for their breadth and originality, not for their engagement with psychoanalysis or

Bonaparte. Nonetheless her study has been profoundly influential well beyond the nineteen-fifties.

Beyond that of any other American literary subject, we can speak of a remarkable relationship between Poe and Freud. While other approaches emerge and disappear with changing critical priorities, psychoanalysis as it has pertained to Poe studies has proven adaptable and has sustained its relevance. It will occupy an important place in the final chapters, in part because forms of this and derivative approaches, such as Jungian-archetypal, continue, and because certain features of psychoanalysis have become so deeply ingrained as to be almost inseparable from our understanding of Poe.

Poe himself, by his intensive focus upon the mental state in moments of crisis, suffering, and illness directs his reader's mind to the psyche. At times he almost seems to be presenting his narrators as patients or case studies. As Clive Bloom puts it, "one reason for psychoanalysis' fascination with Poe is that Poe conceives of a world which is a mirror image of Freud's own" (8). Indeed, his attention to problems of self and identity, represented for instance in the use of doubles, or in the dissolution or fragmentation of the individual identity, prefigure a psychic structure which resembles that conceived by Freud and Jung far more than it does the philosophical constructs of Locke and Hegel current in his own day.

If psychoanalytic criticism grew logically and chronologically out of biographical criticism, there is a key difference: critical recognition of the dynamic of the unconscious in Poe's work marks the central watershed in the history of Poe and Pym studies. The early simplistic judgments that Poe's writing was the product of genius or,

conversely, a diseased imagination is not explanation but elision of the strange or ulterior in his work. Shoshona Felman suggests that certain key words in earlier criticism that purported critical judgment--"magic" or "magnetism" as metaphors for the ingenuity of his verse, for instance--indicate contradiction and denial of the irrational in Poe's work that itself resembles a psychoanalytic effect (137).

Psychoanalysis provided an applicable structure, one moreover with the prestige of scientific authority, which gave dimension to, and permitted analysis of, the ulterior realm recognized in Poe's work--whether that realm is of the dreamworld, the supernatural, or a mental state pushed beyond some extreme. The permanent legacy of psychoanalytic criticism of Poe is the opening it created for "the possibility of a dialogue with unreason," as Foucault put it, in reference to the work of artists with a similar imaginative commitment, such as Holderlin and Raymond Roussel (Madness 198). Criticism, then, has juxtaposed Poe and Freud for the reflexive support they offer in their common endeavor to create a space and a discourse for unconscious desire.

But the relationship is not only one of mutual support. As inviting as the texts are for symbol analysis, they ultimately elude the analyst's explanation. Foucault might have been speaking of Poe when he said of Raymond Roussel, "His is a language that comes to us from the depths of a night that is perfectly clear and impossible to dominate" (qtd. in Racevs'is 49). Freud himself, in his endorsement of Bonaparte's comprehensive, exhaustive attempt, sounds almost apologetic in admitting "investigations such as this do not claim to explain creative genius" (Bonaparte xi). Yet repeatedly psychoanalysts return to Poe, only to confront the product of mental processes that are beyond

their grasp, meanwhile conferring "a status that other authors do not have" (Bloom 3).

Critics have come to recognize that Poe interrogates Freud as much as Freud does Poe--as Clive Bloom suggests in his book entitled Reading Poe Reading Freud. Inevitably, psychoanalytic critics will perforce see the text as a situation for or of analysis. Thus Lacan calls "The Purloined Letter" a "fable of psychoanalysis"; and Derrida says derisively that wherever it looks, "psychoanalysis always... refinds itself" (173). As critics of Bonaparte and Lacan, such as Derrida, Clive Bloom, and Shoshona Felman have shown, just as the therapist-analyst becomes a participant in the patient's situation by the mechanisms of transference and countertransference, the critic-analyst becomes enveloped in the frame of the subject of analysis (Clive Bloom 2). The frame of the text grows for each commentator, whose analysis encompasses the role of analyst played by previous commentators. These lose in succession their positions of power outside the frame, much as the characters of "The Purloined Letter" do their's, as the letter changes hands. Only Poe's position is enhanced, as engineer and master analyst, his own text unmastered. This irony might not have surprised Freud, who regarded psychoanalysis as a latecomer, and acknowledged that his concepts were anticipated by artists.

A fundamental variation within the psychoanalytic approach to Poe is in the aim and object of the criticism. Over time we observe a shift in the object of analysis: from psychoanalyzing the author, to content or character. If in the former the text is read as symptomatic data, in the latter it is recognized as a representation of a psychological situation, the author's awareness of which may vary. Critics have

acceded progressively greater awareness, control and prescience to Poe in his representation of the psychology of his characters.

Both the proto-psychological studies and the earliest psychoanalyses find within the text and the thin and often inaccurate biographical record evidence of symptoms, on the basis of which various diagnoses of Poe are rendered. These ranged from "hereditary psychopath" and "epileptic" to victim of a "brain lesion" and of alcohol- or drug-induced "mental disease."¹ Joseph Wood Krutch developed an early influential definition of Poe's condition: his work reveals a neurotic "removal from reality," and sexual impotency, brought about by a fixation on the mother, which stood between him and a normal life. Krutch's work, characterized by conjecture and extravagance, was soon thoroughly discredited.²

Yet Bonaparte's study, while reflecting a superior understanding of both psychoanalytic theory and Poe's life and work, used essentially the same approach and came to similar, if more elaborate conclusions. Like Krutch, she makes no conceptual distinction between artwork and dreams. Even in a chapter titled "Literature: Its Function and Elaboration," her discussion of literary production is a comparison based entirely upon similarity between art on one hand and on the other dreams, symptoms and other manifestations of unconscious impulse--as in "Like our dreams, works of art...represent a sort of safety valve for the repressed instincts" (209). While she clearly believed, along with Freud, that the conscious was involved in its creation, she finds no basis for conceptualizing it within the framework of psychoanalysis--outside of which she does not stray. We must settle for a very few, mystical statements about either the artistic genius or the

interaction of the conscious and unconscious: "There are men with a mysterious gift who can clothe...instinctual gratifications in forms which allow others, also, to dream their dreams with them. How this is done is an aesthetic problem still unsolved" (664).

Bonaparte's study was criticized on a number of grounds, and we will examine some of them later in the chapter. One line in particular, however, faulted her for failing to discriminate between Poe and his characters, smoothly attributing, for instance, Pym's compulsive movements toward the mother symbols (ship, sea, and South Pole) to both Pym and Poe--sometimes as "Poe-Pym." Unquestioningly she assumes that the connection between Poe and these characters is unconscious and itself compulsive, rather than artistic.

Subsequent studies by Davidson, Patrick Quinn, and Allen Tate, among others, portray a very different relation between the artist and his work. While each considered Poe's life relevant more or less, their discussion of the formal elements, philosophical integrity, and aesthetic sophistication all suggest an artist in absolute and minute control of his materials. The relation between conscious artistry and unconscious content in Poe's work, implicit in these studies, was the focus of two widely-read studies of 1963, James Gargano's "The Question of Poe's Narrators," and Floyd Stovall's "The Conscious Art of Edgar Allan Poe." Gargano establishes on the basis of formal evidence the superiority and therefore the distinction of the authorial in relation to the narratorial consciousness. Responding to the psychoanalytic criticism, Stovall wryly suggests that we "should not suspect the betrayal of the author's unconscious self until [we] understand all that the conscious self has to contribute" (178). He correlates Poe's

critical theory and his poetry to support the claim that the latter was the "product of a healthy and alert intelligence" (178). Psychological and psychoanalytic readings with this basic perception of Poe's relation to his work, such as that of Paul Rosensweig and Sybil Wuletich-Brinberg tend to psychoanalyze a character, with little or no reference to Poe himself. Implied in these analyses is an author with prescient, sophisticated understanding of psychic processes.

Receding in the height of the New Critical academic environment, and perhaps subsumed within a surge of Jungian and myth interpretation through the nineteen-sixties and -seventies, psychoanalytic criticism of Poe reemerged in the -eighties.

The continued relevance of psychoanalytic study of Poe is most evident in the 1988 publication of The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading, which collects some of the articles in a substantial, ongoing debate in poststructural American theory (Muller and Richardson). In these readings Poe moves from Bonaparte's couch, so to speak, to any of several positions of power. In his "Seminar on the 'The Purloined Letter'" (1956), Jacques Lacan suggests that Poe has written a sort of elaborate parable of psychoanalysis.³ In the oedipal situation, prohibition and displacement have enabled the child to negotiate the conflicting demands of the pleasure- and reality principles, directing his libido into a gender role and extra-familial relations. If this fails, a psychoanalyst may be able to accomplish this later through transference, in which the patient unconsciously identifies the analyst as the parental figure his psychic conflict involves--and so works through it.

Lacan accepts the basic oedipal symbolic structure of the story as

Bonaparte articulated it: In stealing the compromising letter, ostensibly for blackmail of the Queen, the Minister has possessed himself of the Queen, or mother, violating the incest prohibition, and gaining an advantage in the struggle with the King/father. The letter is a phallus, representing power for its possessor; as a signifier, the letter also "represents" an absence--as indeed the "maternal phallus" does, according to Freud. The Minister has "displaced" the King/father, and Dupin steps into the Minister's original place as son to repeat the Oedipal struggle, including a second purloining. In restoring the still-undisclosed letter to the Queen, Dupin resecures the power of both King and Queen. In terms of the parable, he is the psychoanalyst who has intervened to restore familial/social harmony.

In his theft, the Minister initiates a series of displacements of the letter, in a chain, or circuit, that leads back to the Queen. According to Lacan, Poe undermines two fundamental epistemological assumptions: first, the security of representation: each time the letter/signifier changes hands its signification changes. In the Queen's it signifies her concealed desire; in the Minister's her vulnerability and his power, and so forth. Thus the letter functions only as a signifier of other signifiers. Secondly, the idea of a stable subject is challenged, as characters assume each others' places in the repeating oedipal triangles:

What Freud discovered and rediscovers... is that the displacement of the signifier determines the subjects in their acts, in their destiny, in their refusals, in their blindness, in their end and in their fate, their innate gifts and social acquisitions notwithstanding, without regard for character or

sex, and that, willingly or not, everything that might be considered the stuff of psychology, kit and caboodle, will follow the path of the signifier (43-44).

Lacan's analysis implicitly challenges Bonaparte's reading. First and most obvious is the paradigm shift implicit in Lacan's focus upon the text over the author. Against Bonaparte's condescending diagnosis of a "sick" Poe, Lacan foregoes discussion of Poe's background, personality, or intentionality. He analyzes Dupin, as Poe's surrogate analyst, but leaves the author outside his frame of reference, the master analyst whose story has something to teach us.

Both see compulsive repetition as the dynamic driving the action. But while Bonaparte tries to elucidate the signified that is repeated in so many ways (Poe's unconscious fantasy about returning to his mother), for Lacan what is primary is the sign itself and the "symbolic order which is constitutive for the subject." The repetition is "the itinerary of the signifier" in a series of displacements, and the reorientation the surrounding subjects receive (29).

In his response to Lacan, in "The Purveyor of Truth" (1975), Jacques Derrida elaborates an argument based on Lacan's supposed failure to "frame" the story: Lacan is apparently oblivious to the distinctions between author and narrator, and story and narration, and to the relevance of the epigrams and the allusive anecdotal material preceding and following the two successive oedipal triangles of the main action. What Lacan concealed behind the clarity of the two triangles, Derrida exposes: an ever-widening frame of discourse. Derrida points to an "infinitely regressive reference to previous writing," constituting the "crumbly, abyssal, non-totalizable edges of the story's frame," in

Barbara Johnson's words (Muller 233). In not framing the story, he fails to realize the "unframeability" of the story; or the links by which it is connected to previous and future texts--for instance the discourse of psychoanalytic theory, which, says Derrida, "finds itself/is found" in Poe's text. Ontological truth-claims which underlay Lacan's analysis of the signifier, above all the oedipal situation itself, Lacan leaves concealed and unexamined "beyond the writing"--of Poe's story, of Lacan's text, and presumptuously, of language itself.

2

Bonaparte and Psychoanalysis: Poe as Patient

In her massive psychobiography, Marie Bonaparte provided an enduring contribution to the study of Pym. She regarded this work as the most penetrating of the Poe canon in revealing the psyche of its author, and in her sixty page Pym chapter we have not only the first sophisticated psychoanalysis, but the first thorough, profound analysis of any kind. She is the first to posit a theory of multiple meanings, in her reading of an unconscious subtext: "Though on the surface, a literary work relates a manifestly coherent story, intertwined with it and, simultaneously, another and secret story is being told which is the basic theme... in which the preconscious and unconscious proper, are simultaneously at work" (654). In the area of psychoanalytic biography and criticism, it remains an important standard, for its thoroughness, its fidelity to classical Freudian theory, and its insight.

Bonaparte does not claim theoretical originality, but only strict

application of Freudian principles. She develops a hermeneutic implicit in Freud by categorizing literature as one of a number of forms of manifestation of preconscious or repressed memory and desire--such as dreams and jokes. Freud's correlation of the literary work and the dream particularly interests her. Though Freud never prescribed a methodology of practical criticism--and perhaps because he did not--Bonaparte's practice exploits his detailed discussions on the symbolism of dreams, unquestioningly transposing this structure as a totality upon the literary text.

She draws conclusions about Poe from his texts in two ways: first, by analyzing the symbolism of the text in a way analogous to dream analysis; and second, by analyzing the behavior of the character she regards as the author's persona, for symptoms that are then (inexplicably) attributed along with a diagnosis to Poe himself. We must add that these are built upon a third basis of information, Poe's biography, which is analyzed for cause or origin (such as the death of his mother when he was age two), and effect or symptom (abnormal relations with women in adulthood.)

Bonaparte believes that Poe was in the grip of a "sadonecrophilic" compulsion set into motion by the early memory of his mother's sickness and death. Both his life and his work reflect the repetitive fantasy of a return to that setting, which arrested the oedipal complex in incompleteness. In Pym, for instance, "the whole content of this story... is the ardent and frenzied search--ever frustrated, ever renewed--for the lost mother: a mother, always hidden, always present and made manifest here in those vast and universal symbols whose significance is unconsciously sensed by man" (312). Freud suggests that the oedipal

complex normally works to separate life and death instincts in the service of life: the diffuse libido is channeled into genital sexuality and extrafamilial relations; the death instinct into aggression against the father and other rivals.

This lack of separation of eros and death in Poe's case led to a number of abnormalities, such as the tendency to see in real women, and create in fictional women, mother-figures, and the tendency, despite his attraction, toward sadistic aggression against them (repressed in the real women, sublimated in his art.)⁴ At the same time, he recoiled from the sensual in both his life and work. Spiritual or idealized love dominates in place of the erotic, for the pregenital stage at which his libido development was arrested led to a preference for "womb fantasies" (such as in the premature burial images) over evocations of copulation in his work.

Her analyses of Poe's stories and poems begin and end with symbol interpretation. While nowhere does she define the term symbol, she uses it not on the basis of a literary theory, but strictly as Freud does, as an unconscious psychological process. The symbol is a transformation of unconscious energy into a discernible form. According to Freud, interpretation is possible because the unconscious manifests itself in a symbolic system very much like a language.

As in all of Poe's work she finds the mother symbolism permeating Pym. The sea, "the primordial earth state," predominates here, with the universal deep spell it casts on humans, and its suggestion of amniotic fluid. But the ships (especially the floating shipwrecks), the South Pole, the dog Tiger, the island Tsalal, etc. also bear this meaning, each suggesting or offering a different subjective aspect for

Pym of the mother's body, object of his relentless drive. The floating wreck of the Grampus, from whose womblike hold Pym has emerged, suggests the frailty of his mother's body. It fails both as a secure vessel (i.e., the mutiny and the wreck) and as a source of nourishment, as the meager items of food Pym retrieves are inadequate.

The island is the aspect her body would present to a fetus. Its landscape from Pym's point of view mixes images suggesting the womb/birth canal and the intestinal tract. The darkness of the surroundings and inhabitants, rivers that flow, bloodlike, in purple "veins," the inhumation of Pym and Peters, and their wanderings through channels and chasms, finally to emerge into the white world of the polar region--all reflect an idea of the fetus' experience, including the supposed confusion in the infantile perception of the vaginal and the cloacal. The "Tekeli-li" creature, with its long milk-white body, "silky" hair, red claws and teeth, suggests the mother with respect to the incest prohibition, both in its potentially-castrating teeth and taboo status on Tsalal. Bonaparte is careful to point out that the placement and dispersal of the mother symbol, "always hidden, always present," is not logical, but a consequence of Poe's supposed fixation: objects throughout Poe-Pym's field of perception take on the coloration of this and similar "universal symbols" (312).

The many other symbolic objects cluster around one of several other figures of the oedipal situation. For example, weak father figures and authority figures appear throughout the narrative, only to be, rather easily, "overthrown" and/or supplanted in succession: Pym assumes an adult male disguise to foil his Grandfather Peterson, whose sudden appearance threatens Pym's plans; successive leaders of the Grampus are

overthrown, Augustus' father Captain Barnard, by mutiny, and the chief mutineer by Pym and Dirk Peters; Captain Guy forfeits some of his authority to Pym, and is himself destroyed by the chief of Tsalal, who in turn is killed by the crew of the Jane Guy. The pattern of revolt and removal, according to Bonaparte reflects in general the "primal horde" of patricidal brothers described in Freud's Totem and Taboo. More particularly, they represent Poe's fantasy of success in his rivalry with the father, in contrast to his actual youth, characterized by physical abandonment in his early childhood by father David Poe, and personal rejection and financial abandonment in his adolescence by foster father John Allan.

The dispersed symbols converge in the climactic final chapter. The polar environment, with its milky water, its warm snow and its presiding large, white figure, "the great maternal divinity" according to Bonaparte, concentrate the positive and negative features of Poe's experience with his own mother: coldness, death, warmth and milk. In the "embraces of the cataract" (Poe's words), we also have the "consummation" of the fantasy reunion that was doubly prevented for the child Poe by the incest prohibition and her premature death (350). And in that final ersatz Bible quotation, which has puzzled other critics, Bonaparte sees Poe's proclamation of victory over the father: "I have graven it within the hills, and my vengeance upon the dust within the rock" (Note.9).

While the influence of Bonaparte's reading has been widespread, implicit, and often unacknowledged, as we will see, criticism of her methods and conclusions has come from many quarters, and has often been pointed. Reductiveness comes up repeatedly. Gilles Deleuze refers to

the "critical impoverishment" of the rewriting of "whole, rich and random multiple meanings" of the literary text into the same oedipal narrative (qtd. in Jameson 22). Mario Praz complains of the theoretical looseness in the use of dream interpretive techniques to analyze literature: such concepts as "condensation" of symbolic meaning, "scission" (dispersal of the symbol), etc., give Bonaparte room to find in almost any object or episode meanings which will conform to her thesis. In his essay specifically on Bonaparte's reading of Pym, Roger Forclaz makes the same point when he finds tautological reasoning at the core of her methodology: "the work [Pym] is adduced to diagnose Poe's necrophilia, impotence, sadism; this 'fact' about Poe is then used to interpret the work" (190).

Bonaparte's methods of scholarship are suspect on several grounds. She shares with much early Poe criticism a tendency to accept questionable 'facts,' and dubious biographical sources. She also subtly begins to use diagnostic inferences she has drawn as fact. She compounds this problem when such inferences build upon each other in a causal chain. For instance, she offers an elaborate psychosexual explanation of Poe's opium use, as an external sexual prohibition, sparing him the anxiety of his "inner prohibition which banned erection." The inner prohibition, in turn, relates to his supposed sexual impotency and to the "sexless" content of his stories (397). Thus several dubious suppositions with their origins in legend rather than biography are taken as granted and used to reinforce each other.

Underlying some of the statements critical of psychoanalytic criticism is the psychoanalytic correlation of art and neurosis. Bonaparte's study assumes that the mechanisms that operate in dreaming

and recounting the dream, and those involved in literary creation are the same. She simply attributes to Poe symptoms his characters display, and crimes they commit as Poe's own latent or repressed wishes.

In answer to the considerable criticism directed at Bonaparte, Neal Bruss rose to her defense in his "The Discourse of Pym and Marie Bonaparte's analysis of Poe" (1972). He acknowledges basic flaws in her methodology: it is based upon the imposition of interpretive strategies extrinsic to fiction, and upon "notionalistic" symbol interpretation committed to analysis of a signified phallogentric structure. But instead of interrogating conclusions one therefore supposes would be suspect, he aims rather to buttress them with firmer textual evidence--intrinsic, quantifiable, semantic. The result is an unoriginal, rather superficial linguistic analysis, but one bulging with statistics.

He isolates three conclusions fundamental to Bonaparte's thesis (for instance, the boy-in-womb "motif"), and a stylistic form of evidence for each (which Bonaparte has already provided), and then enumerates and categorizes its incidence. For example, phrases describing potentially womb-like interior space, including "within" and "inside," occur forty-five times, while phrases involving descent into enclosing substances such as water or a ship's interior occur 106 times. Finding an "intense latent network" supporting Bonaparte's claim of "the unconscious theme of motherhood," Bruss inadvertently grounds his own argument in the signified. The only distinguishing feature of Bruss's analysis--the enumerations--is undercut by the point his essay makes in spite of himself, that the evocative power of an image or turn of phrase has little to do with its frequency of occurrence.

Permutations of Psychoanalysis

In a brief, recent essay "Mourning in Poe's Pym" (1992), more suggestive than explicative, Grace Farrell grants Bonaparte's view that Pym is 'about' Poe's search for his personal mother. However, refining her own earlier Jungian approach (discussed below), she argues that Pym's quest, and the mourning process in general, must not be conceptualized as pathological, but a healthy impulse toward adjustment to a personal world that has changed profoundly. As conscious art, she argues, Pym stands as a satiric repudiation of the mourning rites associated with the nineteenth-century idealization of death, jarring the reader with the phenomenology and trauma of death, registering its egregious failure to accommodate his grief (see Kennedy Poe, discussed in chapter six).

On the unconscious level, Poe was dramatizing, not ego-regression and loss of self, but the healthy confronting of death. Drawing on the work of John Bowlby on the mourning psychology of children, she argues that as our identity is shaped in part by living others, the bereaved seeks out the lost loved one through memory as part of his/her own development of self. Poe's case was particularly urgent because of nature and timing of the loss. (He was two.) He had to 'find' his mother again before he could do what all children must, that is separate from her and grow as a self: "The goal of mourning is to search for the Other in order to find the self--to emerge reborn out of the death experience" (Kopley Poe's 116). The lack of closure in the text reflects the failure of the search, a claim of Bonaparte's Lee grants. The text "leaves Pym where Poe remained: repetitively poised on the boundary between loss and recovery" (116).

In his "The Search for Identity: The Enclosure Motif in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1980), Paul Rosensweig offers a tightly-drawn psychological reading which implicitly identifies Pym as a kind of autobiographical projection of Poe on the psychological level--for instance, attributing Poe's childhood experiences to Pym (without textual authorization), as a way of explaining Pym's actions. He links Pym's failure to develop a stable identity with the infantile traumata of the gradual deterioration and death of Elizabeth Arnold Poe. Rosensweig establishes Pym's psychological instability both by the way in which his ego dissolves into doubles throughout the narrative, and by his own statically weak sense of self. Unable to grow, Pym is doomed compulsively to return to the infantile scene, concentrated in the narrative into symbols of the womb and the moment of birth, in an effort at resolution. The narrative recycles the same pattern: First, he escapes from a stressful situation to enter a womblike enclosure--Augustus' bedroom, the Grampus' hull, the fissure and then the chasms on Tsalal, to name a few. Related are numerous 'lines' of security suggesting an umbilicus, such as the lines that connect him to Augustus' cabin from the stowage, and that secure him as he dives for food into the submerged compartments of the wrecked Grampus. Second, as in the case of his mother, the initial security and nourishment these provide eventually fail: the lines break, the enclosures become confining and terrifying, the food putrifies.

In a sophisticated and novel reading, "Blank Hallucinations in the Fiction of Poe and Hemingway" (1967), Raymond Tarbox postulates a direct correlation between certain elements in the fiction of Hemingway and Poe (especially Pym), and findings in recent clinical

research on hallucination patterns in sleep and half-sleep states. Certain individuals prone to a depressed or weak mental state, such as Poe and Hemingway (and some of their characters), will occasionally experience one or more of these hallucinations. He discusses several; the one most relevant to his reading of Pym is the 'Isakower mass.' Otto Isakower described the mass as a visual and tactile sensation at the sleep-wake border "of something shadowy and indefinite, generally felt to be round, which comes nearer, swells to gigantic size and threatens to crush the subject" (qtd. in Tarbox 314). Accompanied by a "yearning for engulfment," it is a composite image of the mother's face and breast, infantile memory traces representing food and security, and defensively displacing the stressful situation.

The Isakower hallucination, Tarbox suggests, might explain a series of key dreamlike images in Pym: The big dog Tiger, suddenly appearing in the stowage and nearly smothering a delighted Pym, the cliffside on Tsalal, over which he "had a longing to fall," and the white shrouded phantom standing over the "chasm [which] threw itself open to receive us" (24.14). But it is the cyclic patterns surrounding these images that fleshes out Tarbox's interpretation. According to Isakower, the hallucinator generally experiences a sense of disappointment and then dread toward the Isakower mass, causing him to abandon it, only to repeat the cycle. Citing Bonaparte in noting the importance of weak father/authority figures with which Pym tries to identify, Tarbox suggests the larger pattern: Pym fixes upon several father figures in succession, each not only failing him (as Poe's real and foster fathers failed him), but leaving him in great distress. Resorting to the Isakower hallucination, Pym abandons this too when it, like Poe's real

mother, fails him, becoming itself a source of dread or danger. Pym then moves on to another father figure. In no aspect does Tarbox's reading contradict Bonaparte's; rather he updates it with evidence from research unavailable to her, fulfilling well his carefully delimited aim.

In her The Rationale of the Uncanny (1988), Sybil Wuletich-Brinberg takes an approach unique in psychoanalytic criticism of Poe, for it is the only extended Freudian analysis to focus upon the alter ego over the mother. She complains that many of Poe's scholars "who profess an appreciation for Poe's literary achievement do not confront the irrational in his work" (29), and she exploits Freud's theory of the uncanny as a means of confronting it herself.⁵ It is a promising study in the new line of inquiry that it opens, but rather disappointing in its applications, especially in the Pym chapter, in which she simply abandons her thesis and offers a vague, unoriginal synthesis of previous readings as her own.

In his essay "The Uncanny," Freud sought a psychological explanation for the sense of weirdness or "creeping horror" which we feel toward certain phenomena that do not of themselves seem to offer a threat (Freud 17:219). He cites a wide range of phenomena toward which we react in similar ways--an unnerving sense of dread, a "creeping horror": dolls, waxwork figures, and other automatons, doubles, corpses, dismemberment, coincidence, the "evil eye" effect of an intense stare from the wrong person, supernatural effects and hauntings, certain manifestations of insanity, such epileptic seizures, and compulsive or automatic repetitions. These are Freud's illustrations, yet one could hardly form a more representative gloss of Poe's fiction. What Freud

found in common among these is that they all suggest familiar objects seemingly animated by an unfamiliar agency, demonic or mechanical. To Freud the uncanny effect is an irruption of the repressed fear of dehumanization, that we ourselves are mechanical in essence, and vulnerable to disintegration.

In his analysis of the uncanny effect Freud found the double, as manifested in both psychopathology and art, to be central, and drew upon Otto Rank's study, "The Doppelganger." Rank argued that the double arises from the pre-oedipal narcissistic stage. At this stage, Rank speculated, the double arises as an "insurance against destruction of ego, a denial of death." Beyond this stage, this "other" force, substitute for the mother/world, becomes integrated into the self of the normal individual, as the "special faculty" able to criticize and censor, and assists in social adjustment--the superego, in Freudian terms. However "in the pathological case of delusions of being watched this mental institution becomes isolated, dissociated from the ego" (Rank, qtd. in Wuletich-Brinberg 34). Projected outward, the individual perceives the double as ghastly and menacing, threatening division, interchange, or disintegration of identity. Responses to the double and to the uncanny in general, both in pathology and in art, are dehumanization, megalomania, and paranoia--all richly present throughout Poe's work.

Despite the rich implications, this material is ignored in her analyses of the individual stories to which much of this material is so relevant, such as "William Wilson" and The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, for instance. Most of her insights are in the general remarks in the introductory chapters, where she notes that "Poe's work expresses

terror in the discovery that at the core of being a mechanical essence that implicitly debunks metaphysics, the sensuous world, and art" (49).

Her confused discussion of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym indicates that, like other critics, she found this work more baffling than any she writes about. There are numerous curious statements of dubious logic that are made in isolation of either evidence or ramifications: that "Pym is absolutely sincere in wanting to distinguish his style from his editor's, but his lack of self-awareness prevents him from realizing how similar their styles are"; that "Pym and Poe are one and the same person and that their identity is confirmed by Pym's naming E. A. Poe his editor" (191) (strangely contradicted by two pages of discussion of them as separate characters, from which no point unfolds); and that the Tsalalians are "irrational," and guilty of the "crime" of "prejudging everyone and everything white as hostile and evil" (The Tsalalians are shadow and object, not substance, and to speculate on a Tsalalian inner self is misguided at least.) These are just a few examples; coherence and style visibly deteriorate over the course of the essay. It seems to be an especially clear example of the way in which the narrative has often 'infected' a critical statement with its own qualities of disjunction, assymetry, tendentious extravagance, and apparent lack of control.

The only cogent point to be coaxed out of her discussion of Pym, involving Pym's inner conflict, is not in itself extravagant. The Narrative is one of a group of negating stories in which "death and aggression seem to radiate from the souls of his characters" (181). Pym himself has a "thinness of consciousness" that prevents "a deep understanding of human nature" (189, 191). His inner

conflict--unconscious to him--involves his innocent, affirming self, which is his conscious sense of himself, and his negating or demonic self, of which he is never aware. The negating self finds its expression over the field of his adventures: in the tendency to mistrust and judge others excessively harsh, in his impersonation of Rogers' corpse, in his resort to cannibalism, and the "quasi-pornographic imagination" revealed in his description of the cannibal feast as "exquisite." Pym's failure of imagination is his failure to realize that the self is "a disturbingly rich synthesis," and that "diversity and contradiction" are the "essence of the universe" (193, 195). This one-sidedness culminates in the final image of Pym's disappearance into whiteness, a denial of negation.

3

Faculty Psychology: Poe as Analyst

Allen Tate opened a line of psychological criticism radically different from the psychoanalytic. In two influential essays in the early nineteen-fifties, "Our Cousin Mr. Poe" and "The Angelic Imagination," he sketched out an overarching theory including both psychological and metaphysical implications that are derived from Poe's stories and from putative metaphysical statements within some of these and Poe's rather obscure cosmogony Eureka (1848). Examining Poe's treatment of abnormal psychology within the context of nineteenth-century tools and perspectives that were available to Poe, Tate finds them a good deal "richer in philosophical implication

than his psychoanalytic critics have been prepared to see" (Carlson 239). Tate's own inquiry led him to the conclusion that "Poe's symbols refer to a known tradition of thought, an intelligible order, apart from what he was as a man." That intelligible order is the framework of the faculty psychology, consisting of will, intellect and feeling, which Poe took for granted.

To Tate, annihilation and disintegration are the themes of Poe's work, an idea anticipated by D. H. Lawrence in 1923 and William Carlos Williams two years later. These are the explicit subjects of Eureka and the dialogues, which Tate analyzes in "The Angelic Imagination," and they form the metaphysical counterpart to the facultative psychology of the stories. Physical annihilation precedes spiritual fulfillment, or a return to the "unparticled unity" by which Poe defined God. As Poe himself sums up Eureka, "In the original unity of the first thing lies the secondary cause of all things, with the germ of their inevitable annihilation" (Carlson Recognition 252). Creation itself, the atomic universe, is "in a state of radical disequilibrium, every atom striving to disengage itself from material forms and to return to the original center" (252). In the end, every individual, along with creation itself, "by a reverse motion of the atoms, will contract, as into its annihilation. God destroys himself in the eventual recovery of his unity" (252). Apocalyptic annihilation, then, is simply a larger frame of reference of the personal disintegration of the individual.

Individual annihilation, whether complete mental disintegration, as of Roderick Usher, or in (apparent) physical death, such as the abyssal plunges of Pym and Poe's other sailors, is the fulfillment of a process that begins with a disharmonious relation among the 'faculties.' The

"strange fire" in the luminous eyes of Usher, for instance, betokens an intellect that has hypertrophied at the expense of feeling, and augurs his mental deracination.

Though he draws far different conclusions, Tate owes something of his psychological analysis to two largely disparaging essays. T. S. Eliot ("From Poe to Valéry"), while acknowledging the importance of Poe as an influence in the modern world, disqualifies his writing precisely because it reflects imbalances he perceived in Poe's own mental attributes. As Eliot puts it, "what is lacking is not brain power, but that maturity of intellect which comes only with the maturing of the man as a whole, the development and coordination of his various emotions" (Carlson Recognition 213). Tate responds more favorably to D. H. Lawrence (Classic Studies in American Literature), who in Tate's eyes correctly observed that Poe records the disintegration of the mind, but incorrectly suggests that Poe offers no formation of a new consciousness in its place.

Tate says little about Pym, noting only that its style in certain passages attains the "lucidity" of Jonathan Swift (Carlson Recognition 241). To see how Tate's analysis of Poe might apply to Pym, we turn to essays for which he seems to be a primary influence. Buried deep within a style more obfuscatory and inflated than lucid, one can find an insightful reading in Joseph DeFalco's "Metaphor and Meaning in Poe's Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1976), built upon the foundation Tate has laid.

According to DeFalco, Poe uses the traditional ship-as-soul metaphor in his own way, to depict a psychological abnormality. Specifically, the succession of dismasted and otherwise defective

vessels, and associative nautical procedures such as 'lying to' and stowage, represent a mind that has been deracinated by a "diseased" or "corrupted" imagination. The disease is of course Pym's, not Poe's, and explained in nineteenth-century terms with the view that Poe himself, as "supreme fictionist," has created and engineered this psychological study. Pym is the product of a defective education, "repressive Nantucket life," and excessive familial pressure for success. Unable to cope, he becomes a "melancholic," a type of Werther, willfully prophesying and yearning for suffering. Gradually in the course of his journey he gives himself over to progressively more fabulous events--"lurid imaginings" of his own creation--that overwhelm his intellect and, in numerous instances, his tenuous sanity (30).

DeFalco sees Poe's elaborate frame as a way of conspicuously distinguishing Poe ("Mr. Poe") from the narrator Pym, signalling by "Mr. Poe's" own misgivings that we must not totally buy into Pym's self-deluding "rationalizations" and documentations that feed on his imaginative creations. Though DeFalco promises in his introduction that the final image, the shrouded figure, would "organize the entire narrative," in resolving Pym's destiny, his interpretation of it finally is confused and all but skips over it. But it does draw something from Tate's notion of total disintegration as a precondition for reclaimed unity. In falling into the embraces of Peters (over the cliff) and the shrouded figure (into the chasm), Pym has given himself over to total deracination; he has cleared away the "lumber" of "all the mental faculties that constitute a self in the real world," and is prepared for renewal and "reconciliation with spirit" (61, 67).

Joseph Moldenhauer offers an alternative reading that seems

indebted both to Freud, in his detection of the death instinct, and to Tate, in his analysis of Pym's corrupted imagination. His study is more closely aligned to Tate's than Bonaparte's in its greater accountability to the text as an imaginative product, its treatment of aesthetic values, its refusal to infer conclusions about Poe's psyche, and its exploration of the psychological and philosophical implications within Poe's contemporary framework. In "Imagination and Perversity in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1972), he looks at both the narrative Pym 'writes' and the events he 'experiences' as products of Pym's own extraordinary imagination. Recognizing what Bonaparte missed, a fictional artist and artwork (Pym and "his" narrative) operating within Poe's book, Moldenhauer is able to analyze the artistic process as Poe conceived it in Pym.

For Moldenhauer, the narrative highlights its own origin as the product of a dreaming and hallucinating mind--in the extravagant imagery of death and catastrophe, in the absurd, fanciful, and grotesque objects, such as the racially-mixed, animal-like Peters, and in the instancing of actual hallucinations and nightmares within the narrative. Moldenhauer establishes the "theatricality" of Pym's personality: "All the major episodes of the Narrative are initiated in the hero's mind; Pym first fancies or dreams his exploits, then lives them" (273).

What is of most interest in Moldenhauer's reading is the perversity of that imagination (signalled by Pym's anagram name, associating him with the "imp" of the perverse): In the cyclic pattern of all the near-death and rescue episodes, the imagination of Pym as **voyager** (as well as narrator) creates the events that lead him to the brink of

death, up to the point where he gives himself over to, or even welcomes its embrace. It is a repetitive, instinctual movement toward death itself, "the condition of perfect unity... the enduring union of self and all in death" (278-9).

A number of readers have noticed that the impulse that Poe identified and defined as the "imp of the perverse," in his 1845 tale of that title and elsewhere, resembles Freud's concept of the death instinct, which he regarded as among the most fundamental drives. Instincts themselves are a tendency within "organic matter impelling it towards the reinstatement of an earlier condition... the manifestation of inertia in organic life" (Selection 158). The death instinct, then, is a longing for the inert, inanimate, undifferentiated state prior to the ego. Its task, says Freud, is "to lead organic matter back into the inorganic state" (224).

But the resemblance to Moldenhauer's perception of Pym's perversity is more superficial than it may seem, for Pym's desires and his imaginative capacities, while in one sense regressive, are not limited to a state of inertia or inorganicity. He envisions transcendent union with the divine, even as he approaches annihilation, a "convergence of poetic vision and the mind of God, whether in the artist's perceptions of supernal beauty or in the enduring union of self and all in death" (279). In Eureka Poe described this on the universal level as the primordial and post-apocalyptic states of absolute unity; in Pym annihilation is individual, and imaged in his "grateful" plunge into the "embraces" of the chasm at the pole.

Pym's imagination, then, as manifest in both his life and his narrative, is in one sense the medium through which he conducts his

quest; at the same time that quest is necessarily nihilistic: "irrational, amoral, and self-destructive" (279). Moldenhauer rejects a reductive form of psychoanalysis, and judiciously follows Tate's lead in working within Poe's intellectual context, and specifically, reading Pym (as Tate read other Poe works) intertextually with his speculative literature.

4

Psychology and Formal Analysis: Poe as Allegorist

New Critical Appropriations of Psychoanalysis

Bonaparte's greatest contribution, and through her Freud's, to Pym criticism has been particular rather than comprehensive, and incorporated into a variety of hermeneutics. Those articles that adhered to a strictly Freudian reading--whether sharing Bonaparte's particular emphases or not--were not as numerous, influential, or comprehensive, leaving Bonaparte's as the standard. On the other hand, psychoanalytic principles in their broad outline become a foundation, or a point of departure for other readings, particularly New Critical textual analyses. Of these, the most visible have been readings of Poe and Pym as allegories of mental or psychic processes.

Patrick Quinn set the pattern for building a New Critical reading upon psychoanalytic principles. His The French Face of Poe (1952), is a landmark study in Poe criticism as a whole, helping to implant Poe within the mainstream of American literature by showing in comprehensive detail the extensive appreciation he enjoyed in France and the influence

he has exerted on Baudelaire, the symbolist poets, and other French writers.⁶ In the process he fertilized the field of Poe studies in America with an array of French insights, the most prevalent of which were related to psychoanalysis.

For Pym he offered the first elaborate, sophisticated literary appreciation by an American. His aim, and stated thesis, was to introduce Pym to the American academy, as the profound, ingenious, well-crafted work which he took it to be—even, as he put it, "the one central and focusing story in the entirety of Poe's work" (193). For its introductory purpose, his study is encyclopedic and suggestive rather than penetrating, with the exception of an insightful, well-developed argument that Pym was probably a major influence on Moby-Dick.

Quinn's orientation toward Pym is subtly and ambivalently organized by two French sources: Gaston Bachelard was the first to suggest that the narrative approximates and signifies a dream. In a brief critical statement in L'eau et les rêves (1942), he observed that beneath the adventure story, the narrative is "the full achievement of a remarkably unified dream"; that as "an adventure of the unconscious... [Pym] is among the great works of Edgar Poe" and "among the great books of the human heart" (qtd. in Quinn 192, 291).

More significant, and complex, is Bonaparte's influence. On the first reading, it seems entirely positive. He agrees that "there exists an undercurrent of latent meaning" and "potent dream symbolism at work" in a narrative he calls a "profoundly oneiric drama" (188-89, 200). More to the point, of the several themes he reads in Pym, most seem loosely derived from Bonaparte's analysis. For example, Quinn defines

Pym's "perverseness," manifest in his self-destructive behaviors and longings, as "the intense death-wish," one of the fundamental "psychological dynamics" of the story (194). Also, the Doppelgänger motif, the "bifurcation of the hero" into Pym and Augustus and then Pym and Peters, is defined not only as a dramatic device, but as a fundamental dynamic that "derives its vitality from the deepest levels of Poe's mind" (197).

However, we also detect in Quinn a desire to distance himself from an overtly psychoanalytic stance. Perhaps this is because the introductory functions of his essay preclude much penetrating analysis at all. But throughout we find words that hedge, equivocate and qualify. For instance, acknowledging that his readers will find some of her ideas "extravagant and grotesque," he adds that "after one has edited away the results of her overly ambitious effort at a microscopically diagrammatic proof of her hypothesis, there remains a great deal that is indisputable interest and cogency" (184). Similarly, referring to the cannibal sacrifice of Parker (who was the chief mutineer's son), he notes that her reading in terms of the father/son rivalry "requires not special Freudian acumen but only a sensitive response to the literary text, which... is in evidence throughout the study of Marie Bonaparte" (185-86). These and similar statements, along with his avoidance of the technical language of psychoanalysis, even while he is introducing its concepts, make it seem as though he were walking a line between, on one hand, a psychoanalytic approach he finds appealing, and on the other, expectations of an audience unfavorable to those concepts. Thus he tries subtly to separate her method from the insights it has enabled, in order to make the latter more acceptable.

We will see something like this pattern in many subsequent American Pym critics who offer formalist readings with an inconspicuous psychological component--a necessity in a New Critical academic climate which discouraged reading the author into his or her work in almost any respect.

"The Troubled Sleep of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1960), another early and respected study, follows the same pattern. Building upon suggestions in Bonaparte, Quinn, and especially Bachelard, Walter Bezanson develops a comparison of the Narrative to dream and dream recital.

He calls his own study a complement to Bonaparte's.⁷ He explicitly accepts her explanation that Pym's journey is a "search for the mother," but these "latent dynamics" provide only a backdrop in his own analysis of technique. Enlightening though he finds it, "clinical analysis is a literary irrelevance to the extent that it takes us back to Poe's childhood and away from Pym" (172). His own emphasis is upon dreams--primarily as a source for Poe's technique and object of his representation, and secondarily as "manifest form" of the psyche. The considerable power of Pym is in the literary evocation of "dream forms," including the effects of various kinds of dreams, "fancies" and "psychal impressions" of near sleep (159). He calls to mind here Henry James, who criticized plot and character in Pym, but acknowledged the deep impression the dreamlike final scene made upon him (Art 256; The Golden Bowl 256-257). Provocatively, Bezanson suggests that the narrative itself represents "a psychological projection from the mind of a troubled sleeper who wakes and then drops back into the self's midnight" (173). Both meaning and structural logic are grounded not in the "strained artifices of the plot," but upon disconnected episodes that

culminate in "sudden tableaux or dream pictures, marked by visual intensity and highly charged with emotion" (153). This structure is a rhythmic return to the "dreamworld" of the primary episodes, involving themes, or dreams, of, for instance, burial and rebirth, in the hold of the Grampus, deprivation carried to the point of cannibalism, on the floating wreck, "grossly primitive" race hatred on Tsalal, and the final journey into the unknown. The climax represents final surrender to the dreamworld.

Psychological Allegory

In Poe: A Critical Study (1957), Edward Davidson first developed the idea that Poe wrote allegories. Despite the fact that Poe decried this form as the worst example of the "heresy of the didactic," and disdained it as unimaginative, predictable fare of popular magazines, he himself, Davidson argues, wrote relatively pure, didactic allegories. But they were hardly conventional in theological outlook.

To see Poe's stories as psychological allegories, we must look beyond the narrower conventional definitional requirements of allegory as a closed system of images, and explicit indication within the work of the abstractions represented. We certainly must look beyond the theological orthodoxy entailed in the allegory proper. Davidson makes a category of nineteenth-century "allegorists" such as Melville, Hawthorne, Poe and Dickinson, who because they were not orthodox believers could "investigate and dramatize religious themes with a clarity which, to some extent, is denied the believer" (183). The looser formal criteria here are probably more appropriate to the verb form "allegorize" than the noun, suggesting the prerogative of dropping

and picking up the method within the same work. Drawing from musical categories, Northrop Frye called this the freistimmige style, in which the structure can be broken, yet remain present. Beneath its conventions, allegory ultimately is "thematically interested imagery," as Frye puts it, extended sufficiently to become the "controlling influence" of the work (Frye 89; Holman 11).

Davidson develops Poe's "allegorical tales" as little dramas that work out any of several basic themes, for instance, the simple moral equation that the hero wants to do evil, and then wants to receive punishment. Besides the perversity of the hero, what sets these tales apart is that, despite the appearance of a great orderly moral superstructure, the hero finds himself terrifyingly alone, like the "Man of the Crowd," an "outcast of the universe" (186). Most importantly, those which he calls the "psychic dramas" become Poe's investigation of the inner self, in a method "entirely pictorial, as if the material world could assume a psychic dimension" (196). In this respect, the material world--the narrators' dwellings or doubles, for instance--represent projections of interior elements, dramatizing a psychic process, usually the disintegration of the self.

Richard Wilbur took up the idea of Poe as psychological allegorist in "The House of Poe" (1959). Noting that the meanings of an artist "so devoted to concealment and deception and unraveling" will be found "below the surface as a dark undercurrent" (99), he observes, that these meanings are always primarily intrapsychic processes. As he puts it, the stories "occur within the mind of the poet; and its characters are not independent personalities, but allegorical figures representing the warring principles of the poet's divided nature" (original emphasis) (117).

Leslie Fiedler also develops a model of psychological allegory in his reading of Poe, and he applies it to Pym. He has interlaced Freudian and Jungian materials throughout his literary history, Love and Death in the American Novel (1960). In it, he contends that the decisive factors in American culture have been sexual repression and sublimation of eros in violence, a process he traces to the Puritan and evangelical heritage, and **to the unique situation in which Americans found themselves relative to the wilderness and the Indians.** Because of the wider social and historical dimensions of his thesis, his commentary on Pym will be examined in chapter five. So too will Davidson's and Wilbur's, for neither man applies his respective model of psychological allegory to Pym, which they read as a visionary document with deeper links to Eureka, for instance, than the short stories.

One critic of Poe who tries to link Pym with the stories as psychological allegories is Daniel Hoffman. His 1978 book, whose title repeats Poe's name seven times to signify the varied personae Poe presents (for instance, "Hoaxiepoe"), is perhaps as widely known as any book on the subject, possibly because it is accessible to a high school-level reader, and is not cluttered with documentation. It is somewhat scattershot in its approach and influences, and perhaps understandably quirky, from an author who is primarily a poet rather than scholar. (Indeed, like Tate in "Our Cousin Mr. Poe," he opens his study with a discussion of the rich subjective effect Poe has had on him from adolescence, and implies a personal kinship, as a fellow poet.)

While certain readings are almost identical to Bonaparte's,⁸ (whom he mentions only to disclaim), and his thesis has a generally Freudian orientation, he has followed Tate's and Wilbur's lead in

focusing upon the texts rather than Poe's mind as the object of analysis. From a superior position as a master of his materials in their effect on his readers, Poe "speaks to us not as a psychotic but a man," one who "lived with his unconscious pulsations close to the surface of his skin," and was uniquely able to "summon" them (322).

He sees the stories in general as various allegories of one basic abnormal psychic process: the overthrow of reason by irrational forces within the psyche. Poe is highly uneven in the quality of its discussions, but in his best analyses, such as that of "The Fall of the House of Usher," Hoffman decodes a symbolic language whose terms appear in numerous stories (it would be more accurate to say he applies codes worked out in parts by Tate, Davidson and Wilbur): the sealed, organic house, or the weirdly lighted, circular chamber as a metaphor for the psyche; the letter as a "summons" from the unconscious; doubles in the form of friends, relations, spouses as allegorical figures of his fragmented psyche, roughly in accord with Tate's tripartite configuration. The hero's relationship to these figures generally involves murder and burial, or union, often incestuous--both misguided attempts at psychic adjustment. The former, an act of repression, leads to self-destroying irruption, such as confession or vengeance; the latter is another form of murder by possession and objectification, as in the cases of Madeline and Eleonora. Ultimately both murder and incest are self-murder.

On Pym itself Hoffman is ambivalent, and his essay is a confused agglomeration of literal, psychoanalytic, sociological, archetypal, and apocalyptic elements that translate into an uncertainty about what Poe is doing in Pym. The black community on Tsalal, for instance, is said

variously to represent Poe's fear of a slave revolt in the American South (270); his fear of "atavistic impulses" within himself (271); and his "imaginative regression" to death, as the white region of the pole was to rebirth (271-272)--none of which is original with Hoffman, except in their combination. He attempts to distance himself from Bonaparte's reading, which viewed the work as "a sprawling mass of compulsive repetitions," yet acknowledges that Poe is not "in full control," and suggests that "the struggle to master the uncontrollable is the very theme of Pym's Narrative" (266).

In fact, if anything orients his reading it is Bonaparte's interpretation, onto which he grafts so many other ideas. Distilled of the extraneous, the outline of his reading is as follows: Pym is seen as a passive individual intellectually limited to a narrow form of rationalism, and driven by unconscious compulsions:

Pym's destiny is of course seated in his unconscious, whence it rises again and again to dominate, in terror and in ecstasy, his feckless life of choices.... This power that surges with uncontrollable energy and directs body and mind toward ends it will not articulate... we acknowledge as the id whose behests cannot be transcended or escaped. In Pym, the narrator is as helpless in its grasp as are his vessels in the tidal currents of the sea (268).

One aspect of these unconscious forces takes the form of Pym's perverse destructive impulse and craving for suffering, which Hoffman describes in terms Freud used for the death instinct--"the longing for the living body to die, of the organic to become inorganic" (273). The ending itself Hoffman sees as infantile regression toward two "opposite yet

complementary conditions," the state of death represented by the island, "the frightening ecstasy of [the individual's] reintegration into the unity from which it has been exiled," and the state of rebirth, represented by the maternal shrouded figure, the milky south sea, and the chasm, by which he enters the "womb of the world itself, from which he was born, and is reborn" (273, 277).

Leonard Engel, in "Edgar Allan Poe's Use of the Enclosure Device in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1978), provides a modified initiation reading that is grounded in a conflation of Freudian and Jungian theory. Like the others, he argues for the structural integrity of Pym based upon the pattern of the repeated motif of enclosure. Much of the essay is the enumeration of instances, allusions, and metaphoric verbs of enclosure, fluxuating between apparently threatening tomb- or prisonlike enclosures and protective womblike refuges. He sees this image not only as a reification of a mental state (undeveloped, dependent), but as an aesthetic device independent of latent content. There are five principal instances around which the narrative is organized, in the rhythms of enclosure/death and emergence/rebirth.

Unlike most other readers, who see Pym become more lethargic, passive, and uncomprehending with each stage, Engel sees Pym emerge from each womblike enclosure with a more sophisticated perspective and a more developed identity. While the enclosures certainly are a metaphor for the womb, he suggests that they are even more directly a reification of an inner state, and that by drawing in upon himself Pym is able to access his own unconscious resources of creativity, energy, and strength. For example, in contrast to the childlike, passive Pym of the Ariel and Grampus episodes, on the Jane Guy he has developed authority

to become a controlling influence on the captain; and Engel notes that it is Pym that saves Peters from burial, and makes the key decisions that save their lives while hiding out on the island.

In "Dirk Peters: A New Look at Pym" (1969), Peter Sheehan briefly develops an allegorical model based on the bifurcation of the psyche into imagination and reason. The pattern of Peters' repeated rescues of Pym from disastrous situations, which Pym's own extravagant imagination has created, is a metaphor for the tempering influence of reason on imagination. As the two characters grow closer, they reflect a process of integration of the mind into a balanced whole.

5

Jungian Archetypal Models: Poe as Mythmaker

Several of the important studies I have called psychological allegories involve a conflation of Jungian and Freudian ideas. Of these the Jungian part tends to be deemphasized in the studies themselves, and therefore in my own discussion. This should not be surprising, since Jungian archetypal criticism was founded upon elemental Freudian principles--for instance the bifurcation of the psyche, and the concepts of repression, projection, and complex, which receive only a different coloration in Jung's use. Thus Freudians speak of a process of psychic adjustment and psychic integration not profoundly different from Jung's individuation.

This is not to say there are not significant differences, especially in the concept of libido, the origin of religious experience,

and the philosophical outlook. But the differences in the morphology of the psyche and the origin of instinct do not play out in profound differences in the psychic dynamics of the individual. One supposes this is part of the reason we often see literary studies of Poe and others that conflate concepts from both systems without necessary incoherence, and even theoretical studies, such as Erich Neumann's Origin and History of the Unconscious, that definitively cannot be assigned to one school or the other.

There is a species of myth criticism in America rooted in Jung which was highly popular in the sixties and seventies. However its work on Poe has not been very fruitful. Those which might be classed as myth studies of Pym, responding to not-very-subtle nudges offered by Poe, focus upon the apocalyptic strain of certain portions, and typical features of the narrative, such as cannibalism, the hero's journey, confrontations with monsters, subterranean adventures, and potential initiation. In the actual studies of Pym these most often take the form of undeveloped suggestions; as a potential approach to Pym, they take the form of unfulfilled promise. One wonders if this is related to the fact that Pym does not act like a hero-initiate, remaining physically rather passive and spiritually vacuous and static. Unlike Freudian criticism, Jungian criticism tends not to interpret examples of failed integration or initiation. Their putative transpersonal, mythic value predispose these heroes to success, and their journeys are inherently structured upon movement toward wholeness and completion.

Those studies which argue for a second level of meaning in Pym that is cosmic and metaphysical rather than psychic--what has been variously

called visionary, transcendental, or apocalyptic readings, and have often linked Pym with Eureka--no doubt owe something to Jungian myth study, but will be more appropriately discussed in chapter five, which examines readings linking Pym to romanticism. Here we will close the chapter by looking at those Jungian archetypal studies, slight in number and quality, which are psychologically rooted.

Only one merits much attention, for its superior sophistication, its unique, even exciting, thesis, and the light it sheds upon anomalous features of the narrative. In "The Dragon and the Uroboros: Themes of Metamorphosis in Arthur Gordon Pym" (1978), Barton Levi St. Armand continues work he has done on the uses Poe made of occult symbolism in structuring his fiction. Taking the umbilical, uterine, and womb imagery more literally than others, he argues that Pym is an allegory of the "the initial stage of consciousness struggling to free itself from the slumber of 'unconscious development.'" Pym's world is not infantile, but embryonic, and he emerges a "still-undeveloped germ of ego consciousness" (66). In addition to the metaphoric structure of the sea voyage, he uses alchemical symbols of metamorphosis to play out his "fetal drama." He notices the large numbers of reversals of fortune, transformations of character, and horrifying events that resemble so many stages of the classical alchemical transmutations: mortification, sublimation, separation, purgation, putrefaction, fermentation, and conjunction, to name a few.

The two dominant symbols that permeate the Narrative are permutations of the ancient symbols of the uroboros and the dragon--symbols alchemy appropriated as opposite values. The uroboros, traditionally depicted as a snake swallowing its own tail, symbolizes

self-sufficiency, totality, eternity, and the reconciliation of opposites--male and female, it is at once impregnating and giving birth to itself. Pym draws attention to certain of these features in the hiche de mer, a round mollusk with only two opposite organs: "absorbing, and... excretory" (20.4), and the Gallapagos tortoise, focusing on its snake-like head and neck, its round shape, and its self-sufficient capacity to store water and to endure without food for "up to two years" (12.17).

If the uroboros suggests completion, the dragon--grotesque, assymetrical, hybrid--represents malformation or "arrested development." Pym is heavily populated by creatures and humans with these attributes, and St. Armand points out that these are also the features of Pym's narrative. Pym's own consciousness has abnormal qualities. For instance, in addition to his perverse longings and behavior, he not only lacks perceptual growth, but seems to lose his ability to comprehend and articulate, until language fails him altogether.

The dragon is also a symbol of transformation, for good or ill, and the animals, people, and situations are always changing their aspect. An unnatural conjunction, such as the hybrid, can produce a greater, sinister monstrosity, for instance the "hermaphrodite brig" appearing as a savior becomes the horrifying death ship of corpses. But the transformation generally has the beneficent result of a reconciliation of opposites, a uroboric whole that propels Pym's own development and metamorphosis. Thus the Grampus, whose name can refer to the killer whale or the sailor's friend, the dolphin, ultimately supplies food and drink that save them; the "fiendish," bestial halfbreed Peters ultimately becomes Pym's savior; and, in a process resembling the

alchemical reaction known as putrefactio, the decay and morbidity on the Grampus becomes a process of purification and ultimately the salvation of Pym and his helper.

For Pym, as a germinal ego, the uroboros is "linked to the mother, and the rondure of the fetal womb" (65). According to Neumann, "The uroboros of the maternal world is life and psyche in one; it gives nourishment and pleasure, protects and warms, comforts and forgives" (qtd. in St. Armand 68). Jung's and Neumann's discussion of maternal uroboric incest, when the ego is still germinal, is a salubrious, necessary process (as opposed to the deadly, prohibited incest of infancy). Thus the climactic transformation emerges out of the conjunction of black and white, clarified in south seas as Tsalal and the white animals, in a projective alchemical reaction suggested by the luminosity, the aurora, the "ashy shower," and the "coruscation of all colors and a conjunction of elemental substances into one" (65). The great white figure is the uroboric mother, and Pym's submergence into the chasm's embrace is "uroboric incest" which will provide resources of strength and creativity which will fuel his own transformation, as he goes on—perhaps in the missing chapters, St. Armand speculates—to "transcend the matriarchal world... for the active challenges of the Hero Myth" (69).

Richard Levine, in "The Downward Journey of Purgation: Notes on an Imagistic Leitmotif in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1969), organizes the novel on the basis of "above" and "below" imagery in the world through which Pym journeys as metaphor for the conscious/unconscious and rational/irrational dichotomy of his mind. The shoreline, deck, the earth's surface, and the equator itself are all

lines dividing the world of order and light from chaos. Below each line Pym encounters dangers that produce irrational states of mind. Pym journeys downward and outward into danger, away from reason, home, and safety in a quest motivated by irrational desires for "discovery" and the "possibility" of life in a "more spiritual sphere" (29). What he discovers is his capacity for overcoming obstacles, making his voyage "the purgative journey of man: from shadow to light to salvation" (31).

In his essay "Poe, Pym, and Initiation" (1970), David La Guardia offers a confused interpretation reflecting misunderstanding of basic facts about the plot and virtually a reversal of his thesis midway through. Early on we learn that Pym fails to reach the state of "maturity and wisdom experienced by other famous initiates," yet later we are told that the Narrative is "Poe's masterwork in the evolving consciousness of a fully developed man" (82). Kathleen Sands' "The Mythic Initiation of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1974) is a more readable treatment of the same theme. Drawing from Joseph Henderson and Joseph Campbell, she distinguishes two kinds of initiation rituals, or "inner journeys...of mental and spiritual growth": initiation into manhood and into the priesthood as "shaman or seer," which, if survived, "gives him insight into the inscrutable and power over the non-elect" (14).

She puts Moffitt Cecil's two-narrative theory of Pym's structure to her own use, to argue not for the work's disunity, as Cecil does, but for its unity based upon a doubling of the initiation motif (See ch. 4 below). In the "first" narrative--the Ariel and Grampus episodes--Pym undergoes initiation into manhood. She finds examples or parallels of the various typical rites in these chapters, including undergoing physical, mental, and spiritual testing, confronting a labyrinth,

adopting a guide, learning moral lessons, and killing someone. In the "second" narrative he undergoes the shamanic ritual, which involves a repetition of the first at a higher and more perilous pitch "in order to penetrate and come to an understanding of the oneness of the Universe" (14). Pym's disappearance into the polar mists represents "the ascent to heaven to obtain the consecration of the gods" (16), while the reticence of the Narrative regarding subsequent events and the "lost chapters" is explained in terms of the ritual: the reader can only "speculate on the degree of godlike wisdom Pym has gained... [because] the reader (who is not one of the chosen) is excluded from the ultimate experience with the gods" (16).

Grace Farrell Lee's "The Quest of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1972) begins by acknowledging the biographical and formalist evidence that Pym was composed hastily under pressure, but asserts that such evidence "does not preclude the existence of a structural principle underlying the successive stages of the story," or that Poe was exploring "in fictive form a phenomenon fundamental to his human experience" (23). She concentrates upon Pym as a narrative of the initiatory descent into hell, imaged in "pagan" and Christian mythology--an archetypal representation of the encounter of the ego with the unconscious, followed by transformation and rebirth. As such, Pym is not an imitation of mythological discourse, but an actual myth narrative, indicated by its attempt to "search for some 'deep axis of reality'" (24). The shape Pym gives to this archetype is the familiar sea voyage, and the imagery of darkness, suffering, and primitivism of the island of Tsalal as hell itself.⁹ Thus the death imagery that pervades the narrative, including the numerous actual deaths, Pym's near-deaths, and

the "ship of death" the four survivors of the Grampus encounter, are given a context in this journey to the land of the dead.

To this she adds complementary symbols discussed by anthropologist Mircea Eliade related to initiatory ordeals in primitive mythology involving regression to the womb: "a hero being swallowed by a sea monster and emerging victorious after breaking through the monster's belly.... [and] descent into a cave or crevice assimilated to the mouth or the uterus of Mother Earth" (qtd. in Lee 25). Both she finds relevant to Pym's ordeal, specifically in the Grampus hold episode, and in the cavern and chasms of Tsalal (and indeed, while it is not necessary for her logic, a grampus is an old term for a small whale.)

Interestingly, her reading values the adventures on Tsalal as more significant overall than the submergence into the chasm at the pole. The former is the climax; the latter is merely the "baptism" in whiteness that "redeems" him back to the land of the living (as earlier submergence and burial scenes betokened baptism into hell.)

As a methodology, there are problems with these readings that perhaps go beyond other kinds of structuralist readings. Looking at Lee's essay as typical, we can see that evidence adduced for the meaning assigned to selected images in Pym is of two interlocking types: literary precedent, and an 'explanatory' phrase of great import.

Literary precedent in biblical and classical materials seems to lend by its very presence substance to both Pym and the essay, even before a reason for its presence is offered. An extreme example will reveal how much is ventured from the slightest of connections. Notice that her interpretation of Pym's final plunge, mentioned above, is based solely upon the presence of whiteness in both Pym and a preceding text:

The Gospel of Nicodemus, which relates the descent [of Christ into Hell], concludes as two brethren ascend from the underworld, are baptized, and clothed in white robes, 'transfigured, exceedingly white, and were no more seen.' Therefore, the ending [of Pym]... provides a conclusion to the mythic-Biblical framework of death and descent to the underworld; and the whole provides a structure from which Poe may descend into the unconscious (31).

Clearly the descent-into-hell archetype represented by Pym's journey is itself a metaphor for something else--a psychic or enlightenment process. These meanings are signalled by phrases of great import: "descent into the unconscious," "reached the foundation of reality," and return "to primal origins" (Lee 30, 31). They too lend weightiness to Pym, but they do not explain. When we have read the last word of the essay, no profound meaning, psychological, metaphysical or aesthetic, has been unearthed. All they really accomplish is to invoke indirectly another body of discourse, the theoretical literature of Jung and Eliade, for instance. Yet the structure and sources of Jung's own work tend to consist of a seemingly endless multiplication of imaginative and literary sources such as those Lee has cited; as with Eliade's ethnographic literature. Without even touching the issue of the existence of the individual- or collective unconscious as the theorists have conceived them, this hall of mirrors calls into question the reliability of her representation.

The only fact Lee might establish is the presence of repetition in Pym of preceding images and patterns, linking it with a literary tradition, rather than a psychological or metaphysical reality. Studies

we examine in the next chapter will contain examples of the archetype rescued from psychological criticism by Northrop Frye, who appropriated the concept as a repetition grounded in literary discourse, not metaphysics or the morphology of the psyche.

Notes

¹These are surveyed and discussed in Young.

²See for instance Edmund Wilson's 1926 essay "Poe at Home and Abroad," reprinted in Carlson Recognitions 142-151, and A. H. Quinn.

³In addition to the key articles by Lacan and Derrida, see especially Barbara Johnson's and Shoshona Felman's contributions to the same volume.

⁴Which apparently kept him out of incarceration, she feels. She states explicitly that had he not been an artist he "might conceivably have spent part of his life in prison or the madhouse" (209).

⁵Daniel Hoffman, in 1973, was the first to notice a potential relationship between Poe's fiction and the uncanny (322).

⁶Cambiaire preceded him with his 1927 study, however this inferior study did not make a profound impression.

⁷Bezanson makes no reference to Bachelard, whose scattered comments on Pym would not be translated until the nineteen-seventies. Nonetheless, in many ways Bezanson's work seems closer to his.

⁸For instance, "Berenice," "Lackobreath," "Lionizing."

⁹Kaplan anticipates her in the latter interpretation. He notes that the unique water there shares several qualities with Styx in Dante's Inferno, as purple and bloodlike (Kaplan 157).

Chapter Four

"I Once Wrote a Very Silly Book": The Problem of Form

1

Context

During the period dominated by New Criticism in the American academy, from about the nineteen-forties through the -seventies, The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym provoked a contradictory response, one paradoxical in several respects, diverse, interesting, and as contentious as that of any other period. Certainly it advanced our understanding of the text. It was the period in which Pym came into its own: most books on Poe included it; studies of his thought and philosophical writings were more likely to incorporate it; scholarship moved toward consensus in the circumstances and progress of its composition, and also established Poe's sources, and the nature and extent of his borrowing; other studies revealed a surprising breadth of cosmopolitan influence it in turn has exerted; American psychoanalytic and Jungian critics did most of their work on it in this period; literary historians moved Pym about among the company of Ishmael, Leatherstocking, Huckleberry Finn, and a few others; and most importantly, the field opened up with many kinds of formal analysis: debate about its genre classification, and about internal formal issues that emerged involving structure, style, symbolism, irony, and narrative

strategy. This set of issues, those of most concern to the New Critics, generated the most debate of this period. There have been numerous close textual analyses, but the formal criticism of Pym has been dominated by debate over whether it even qualifies for such analysis on the basis of stated or implicit New Critical assumptions. This question draws into the formal debate a great deal of what René Wellek calls "extrinsic methods," including source, compositional, bibliographic, and textual materials, and resulted in rather multi-colored, eclectic studies.

This chapter, then will deal with those studies that sought to make sense of Pym on the basis of both formal textual analysis, and source and compositional study. We find in the same study both the intrinsic procedure of establishing internal relationships among the formal elements, and the extrinsic one of embedding the text in a larger contextual frame of genre or biography. What unites them hermeneutically is their attempt to contain and regulate a seemingly irrational text by the accumulation of fact, within and/or around it. That question of qualification was never settled within the framework of formal criticism, but several general positions were clarified: first, formal and thematic scrutiny reveals Pym to be a work of great merit or even a masterpiece despite or because of its unique features; second, formal study, buttressed by compositional and source study, shows that it is a failure, but one worthy of study for the light it can shed upon Poe's thought and art; and finally, that it is a failure, hackwork unworthy of sustained attention.

At the end of the seventies, as other critical currents rapidly began to reshape Pym criticism, Pym remained a minor work and a

problematic text in the oeuvre of an author whose own credentials remained questionable in significant quarters throughout much of this period. Besides Allen Tate's studies, none of the other of the most influential New Critics had much to say of him. For example, Cleanth Brooks finds his work adulterated with Transcendentalist mysticism; and the formative Understanding Poetry, by Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, dismisses as meretricious both the sensational effects in the fiction and the intellectual foundation of his criticism. Yvor Winters's denunciation of Poe's work as vulgar, sentimental, pretentious and trivial has already been discussed. William K. Wimsatt found his symbolism to be confused and bogus, and the poetry insubstantial: "Ethereal vagueness and melancholy, evaporations of languorous and pallid loveliness wreath the figure of Poe" (590, 479). Ironically Poe was the first to pronounce the disrelation between the aims of poetry and of truth or morality, and to argue for objective analysis. Indeed, George Snell makes a case for him as a proto-New Critic in every respect. Nevertheless, they found his poems and stories too contingent upon the world beyond their frame, pointing outward to society, the psyche, and philosophy, for instance, for the kind of objective, autotelic textual analysis some of them were advocating. It is interesting that the only New Critic interested in Poe, Tate, was comfortable with the reference of the work beyond itself--specifically the interaction of Poe's text with his intellectual environment.

Like Poe himself, the New Critics perceived poetic language to be of a fundamentally different order than all other kinds. Prose was regarded as referential to the objective world behind it, including the mind of its author, but poetry communicates experience in a unique and

individual way. As Cleanth Brooks defined it, the poem "is not a secondary transcription into words of a prior event--the poem is a simulacrum of reality... by being an experience, rather than an abstraction, representation, or statement about reality" (Urn 202). Its meaning is not conveyed through the medium of language, but inheres within the language and the unique arrangements of its formations. The critic's business then, was with the words of the text and the body of the poem, as a self-contained, self-referential object. Therefore, boundary and structure are crucial. To try to look through or beyond them is to "do violence to the internal order of the poem," according to Brooks (Urn 202). The poem communicates its experience by the internal dynamics of its elements as they relate to the whole--dynamics that, in the successful poem, instance coherence, balanced tension, and symmetry, even when the experience presented might be described as discordant or even chaotic. Thus not only is the individual poem itself framed, but the way in which it is approached, as well. As Welleck points out, "no coherent body of knowledge can be established unless it defines its object, which to the New Critic will be the individual work of art clearly set off from its antecedents in the mind or... society" (153).

Considering the reservations many New Critics had about Poe, and considering New Criticism's origins in and preference for the shorter poem, it is not surprising to find serious reservations about Poe's problematic long narrative. As Alfred Kazin explains in "Criticism at the Poles," New Criticism distanced itself from novels and narrative literature in general. Like poetry, fiction was properly conceived of as organic and impersonal, growing "in accordance with some inner principle of its own being" (Wimsatt 683). To prevent the intrusion of

the author or narrator, it was to be dramatic in presentation. The novel, arising as it did from narrative literature, was too likely to be a "creature of the writer's ego, either as an expression of his feelings as man or an assertion of his opinions" (Wimsatt 683). On the other hand, the brief poem was more easily perceived as a self-contained object, and lent itself more readily to close textual analysis. But even among novels and narrative literature, Pym is conspicuous in this respect. How could it be treated as self-contained when it is so rich in ideological and intellectual implication, authentic or not? How can a case be made for a "special language" when it draws in and points outward to so much other discourse? (Indeed, besides the unfinished Journal of Julius Rodman, no Poe text draws more heavily upon other sources.) Finally, how can it be treated as objective when it demands so much of the individual reader--to interpret, in the absence of any interpretive voice within the narrative, to provide continuity and "connections," between events and characters, which the master himself, Henry James, pointed out are missing, and to "finish" a narrative with enormous blank spaces in the plot?

Nevertheless, other formalist-oriented critics were drawn to the text precisely because of its experimental, problematic form, and sought to respond to the challenges it posed. Like New Criticism in general, they were responding to what they felt were the inadequacies of socio-historical and psychological forms of criticism, and of traditional source, textual and biographical scholarship. Such approaches, they felt, attempt to make criticism a scientific procedure, but, as R. P. Blackmur put it, obtusely believe they are "making an interpretation by surrounding the work with facts" (qtd. in Welleck

147). Cleanth Brooks asserts that "all such 'formulations' lead away from the center of the poem, not toward it" (Urn 199). Formalist critics of Pym identified this as a serious problem in the commentary on that text--extrinsic "criticism" evades the text, or approaches it indirectly, buffered by theoretical structures, such as psychoanalysis. Look through the literature on Pym, M. L. Rosenthal complains in his stylistic analysis, and "you'll be hard put to find even one passage from which the critic quotes... at any length and then attempts to account for its affective dynamics" (31). But what formalist critics promised, and what a few delivered, was a good faith effort at confronting the narrative's text itself, and in so doing, its novel and disturbing features.

To be sure, formalist critics found their own ways of avoiding address of the text as a whole, or its core: stylistic studies that look at only a few 'remarkable' passages; elaborate theories of structure or symmetry from which no significance unfolds; partial or fragmentary studies that focus on a single image, such as the shrouded figure, a single character dynamic, like the Pym-Peters relationship, or a single episode, in effect arbitrarily mining the text for ore that interests them without comment on the precinct they are mining. Despite the quantity of studies, relative to other periods, and a handful of fine scholarly and critical studies, in retrospect we can see that a large proportion of the discourse of this period, formalist and otherwise, was unenlightening. As Barbara Johnson has demonstrated how psychoanalytic critics become enwrapped within the frame of "The Purloined Letter," essentially writing themselves into the story as analyst, and so losing their detached vantage, so the text of Pym in a

similar process seems to anticipate and invite elaborate formalist schemes, only to undermine the stand taken.

A notable example of the kind of critical traps the text lays is Richard Kopley's formal interpretation. Responding to Poe's 'invitation' to decode the text as if it were one of the variety of ciphers that Pym encounters, Kopley elaborates an incredibly intricate literal explanation that seeks to explain the great white figure, the events beyond the end of the narrative and the work's essential unity. The argument is a house of cards that is increasingly made to stand by sheer force, with growing pages of notations, ever more strenuous explanations, and ever thinner evidence. By the third essay it has become a weighty "hidden" plot involving the migration of an ancient Biblical tribe, the "Edomites" of North Africa, to Tsalal;¹ the annihilation of the Tsalalians as an allegorical reenactment of the destruction of Jerusalem; a voyage of the Penguin (the same one that collides with the Ariel in chapter two) to the South Pole, supposedly to fight its own battle with the Tsalalians along the way, to account for their terror of white objects (with a presumably white penguin figurehead); and the Penguin's second collision with Pym at the pole, effecting his rescue and return to safety.

A product of Kopley's own imagination, this edifice collapses of its own weight. In the reticence of the would-be interpretive voices ("Mr. Poe," Pym, and the "Note" author,) Kopley is drawn into the narrative himself, initially as the cryptographer, a type of Legrand, and later a kind of substitute author/narrator.² David Ketterer has called Kopley's contribution "ingenious" and "one of the most

important," but not a single interpretation of Pym since, including Ketterer's, has incorporated his conclusions.

In fact no overarching stand has endured. At the end of the period bracketed in this chapter, no consensus had emerged regarding the meaning of the elementary features of the narrative, such as: the Ariel episode, the Tsalalians, the white figure, the pole itself, the variety in narrative voice and style, and the unknown final events; and Poe's overall design, if there is one, remains open. Ridgely, surveying the recent literature on Pym in 1978, found fourteen distinct genres for which it had been claimed, ranging from verisimilar voyage narrative, to picaresque, to parody, to Bildungsroman, to burlesque, to "existentialist-absurdist reading," etc. But he found no dominant claim or trend, and simply concluded with a list of questions critics yet needed to address. Thus one critic could say in 1984 that Pym has "continually thwarted our efforts" to find the "key," and another in 1987 that Pym continues to "tease" us, an "impudent and ingenious fiction," as Pym himself predicts his narrative will be judged (Sutherland 12, Robert Lee 115).

John Barth, invited to the 1987 Pym conference on Nantucket Island to give 'a writer's perspective,' expressed frustration to the audience of the leading Pymologists. His paper was, as he said, a record of a variety of essays he had made upon the text in an attempt to find its logic. He finds, for instance, remarkably precise correspondence in the chronology and geometry (e.g., Pym crosses the Equator into the Southern Hemisphere at the precise midpoint of the narrative, Poe interpolates birth- and death dates from his own life into the narrative, etc.), but can find no point to all this. As a sailor himself, the nautical

materials of the "realistic mode" catch his attention, but upon the slightest examination they turn out to be incredible and bogus. He applies the "wandering hero's night-sea journey" and other myth cycles, but finds that the second part of the narrative does not correspond to the generic events of the hero's return (16). Pym himself lacks "the moral-dramatic voltage required of protagonists," and his actions are "meaningless, dramaturgically speaking" (17-18). Even the metafictional concerns of the narrative frame are merely a "mirror trick," and he concludes:

The problem is that Pym, and therefore his narrative, has no mainspring.... [It is] not a counterfeit but an isomorph; not a hoax but a mimicry. Pym echoes the Bildungsroman and the Ur-Myth and mimes the contours of dramatic action the way a praying mantis mimes a green twig but is not a green twig (17-18).

2

The Case Against Pym

We will turn first to studies that argue for the essential incoherence of Pym, by critics and scholars who regard it as either a blunder, a hoax, or a product of some other slight intention. This is the often implicit judgment of many of the scholars who have pieced together Poe's sources and his composition process. We will then examine a sample of the models of unity and design that have been offered, based upon structure, theme, style, and narrative strategy.

Composition History and Form

As we saw in chapter one, the chief biographers held a fairly simple perspective of Poe's mercenary motive for writing Pym and his hoaxing or at least less-than-serious artistic intentions for it based upon documents that are few yet apparently in accord. One, a June, 1836 letter from Harpers Brothers to Poe, explains why they had rejected his "Folio Club" collection, and suggests Poe tailor his writing for the market: the tales were "too learned and mystical" for the "generality of readers," and from their experience it was clear that "Readers in this country have a decided and strong preference for works (especially fiction) in which a single and connected story occupies the whole volume or number of volumes, as the case may be" (rpt. in A. H. Quinn 250-251).

Another piece of documentary evidence detractors always mention is Poe's only known remark about the work. The comment, that Pym is "a very silly book," has been consistently misunderstood because the context has never been properly qualified. It occurs in a letter to William Burton, editor of Gentleman's Magazine and Poe's employer from 1839 to 1840 (rpt. in A. H. Quinn 297-300). In it Poe referred to Burton's 1838 review of Pym (rpt. in Pollin "Contemporary" 39), calling it "severe" but "essentially correct," though it had skewered Pym as a work of "faulty construction and poorness of style," and "a mass of ignorance and effrontery." But he added, cryptically, "you will find yourself puzzled in judging me by ordinary motives" (rpt. in A. H. Quinn 297-300). What is overlooked is that, like the letter as a whole, these comments are offered in a tone of appeasement, in an effort at reconciliation with Burton after a major quarrel; in bringing up the review, he both validates Burton's critical judgment and assures him

that he bears no ill will from it. Poe's apparent dismissal of Pym, therefore, does not by itself justify ours.

Certain of Poe's general statements of criticism are taken as evidence that Pym was not a serious undertaking. The most famous are his many statements of opposition in principle to long works (e.g., works "too long to be read at one sitting" lose the "unity of impression" [Essays 15]). Others have cited comments Poe made about works that resemble Pym, in Poe's 1843 review of James Fenimore Cooper's Wyandotté, as adding further weight to the mercenary as against the artistic motive: Wilderness and sea adventures, while "of intrinsic and universal interest," belong to an inferior class of fiction, "the popular and widely-circulated class, read with pleasure but not admiration," which "a man of genius will rarely, and should never undertake"; moreover, to do so and fail would be "conclusive evidence of imbecility" (Essays 479, 480).

With the authoritative weight of standard biography behind them, Moffitt Cecil (1963), and then Joseph Ridgely and Iola Haverstick (1966) reacted with strong, authoritative articles against the surge of warm appreciation of Pym by Patrick Quinn, Edward Davidson, Harry Levin, Sidney Kaplan, and Walter Bezanson (1952-1960). Both drew upon, and contributed to, biographical and source scholarship, to support internal evidence that Pym was a hoax as well as a deeply flawed work of art. Cecil voices surprise at the claims of unity by one or another recurrent theme, in the face of obvious incongruities in more concrete formal properties, such as style and voice. He argues that the numerous minor discrepancies and errors point to the basic disjunction in the book's middle that breaks it in two, and this is his focus.³ What he finds

is that the hoax Poe has perpetrated was not that of trying to pass Pym off as fact, but of trying to palm off two separate short narratives as one long one, with "little effort to fuse the two." The first, a 'realistic' adventure of a stowaway boy and his dog, has a style, point of view, characterization, and general thrust that is profoundly different from the second, an "arabesque fantasy" of polar exploration (Clarke 216, 222).

The two stories evince different aims as well as sources of inspiration. When Pym speaks of his reasons for stowing away, and his aspirations for sea travel, they involve a romantic, boyish desire for "shipwreck, famine, disaster"--events that unfold in the Grampus story, but bear little relation to the Jane Guy story, which draw upon the current interest in Antarctica and geography and cite the published findings of actual South Seas explorers. Cecil points to the difference in point of view: the first is highly subjective, consisting of Pym's reflections upon his sensations, dreams, and suffering; the second is objective, with almost no introspection, and an unmistakable adult awareness and authority in his interests and in the decisions that he makes. The failure to align the 'two' Pym's characters is but one example of the carelessness with which Poe apparently spliced the two stories. Others are that the stowaway story is simply abandoned, and once Pym boards the Jane Guy all traces of the horrific events are simply erased from the Pym's memory and the narrative. Correspondingly, there is no clear anticipation of the South Seas exploration to come in the Grampus story--only a few seemingly belated additions, such as in the Preface.

In a twist that sets Cecil apart, he asserts that taken

individually, both stories are remarkably coherent, and oddly suggests that reading them independently of each other would "pose no extraordinary problem to the critic" (222). No other critic has suggested this be done, and if he was serious, one can only wonder how disentangling the voyages, and the framing texts that Poe has used to weave them together could so easily be done. (Cecil was pleased to leave it for others!)

He does offer some conjecture on the composition process that would account for the shape of Pym. While at the Southern Literary Messenger, Poe began the Grampus story, conceived as a serialized, short narrative. Parting company before it was completed, and in desperate financial shape in New York, he sought to follow Harpers' advice in tapping the richer market for a booklength single narrative by stretching out the Grampus story, and fusing it onto another story hastily composed from a variety of fictional and nonfictional sea travel literature--submitted by a "desperate Poe" (222).

In 1966 Sidney Moss wrote a widely-read essay building upon Cecil's two-narrative theory. He added little, save the observation that the recurrent themes of deception, revolt, or perversity which critics have noticed do not prove that Pym is unified. Rather, it merely confirms that there are bound to be common thematic elements across his work, and in the two sea stories he imperfectly fused.

Ridgely and Haverstick offer a modification of Cecil's thesis, one grounded in a much more thorough analysis of Poe's composition process and sources than Cecil's or Moss's. The period in question, straddling Poe's first stay in New York (February, 1837 to early summer 1838), remains "the blank period" (Silverman 129). It has yielded the

meagerest documentation and contains the greatest gaps in Poe biography. Nonetheless, the assiduous work of Ridgley-Haverstick has filled in a great deal of the picture of Pym's composition inductively, by collating the information that can be culled from within the text, with the few facts available about Poe's activity during this time.

They agree with Cecil that Poe's primary motivation was to piece together a book. They argue that Pym was composed over a much longer period of time than had been supposed; that it was in fact composed in starts and stops from Fall of 1836 to as late as July, 1838, in discrete stages; that both the storyline and the text composed in each stage varied and took their shape from secondary materials Poe had at hand.

They argue that in fact Pym is five separate narratives; in later articles, Ridgely revised this to four texts/stages, which remains the most widely accepted account: (1) The "Messenger text," which takes Pym to the mutiny in chapter four, was interrupted in January 1837 by the move to New York. Most of this was published in the January and February numbers under Poe's name, projecting itself as a short, serialized, episodic fiction, after the manner of Robinson Crusoe and Washington Irving's wilderness adventure Astoria, both of which he reviewed in 1836.

(2) Unable to find employment in New York, he returned to the sea story in Spring, 1837 with an eye to protracting it into the long narrative Harpers' had advised. The "voyage narratives section," carrying Pym to the end of the Grampus story, draws heavily upon the popular mariner's narratives of shipwreck and adventure, purportedly factual, melodramatic and subjective in tone. Pym's and Augustus's ages were advanced two years, and the Preface seems to have been added at

this point, to account for the appearance of the first two chapters in the Messenger under his own name.

(3) The changes in chapter thirteen between the Grampus and Jane Guy stories that Cecil noted indicate to Ridgely the second break. With the Jane Guy chapters, 13-24, the narrative takes on the tone and aim of factual, more objective accounts of south seas exploration. Having exhausted the former narrative line, he picked it up again when a new controlling idea struck him, that is, to engage Pym in south seas exploration. Poe borrowed and copied heavily, above all from the 1832 Harpers's bestseller Narrative of Four Voyages by Benjamin Morrell, ghostwritten by Samuel Woodworth, and Jeremiah N. Reynolds' April 1836 address to the Congressional Committee of Naval Affairs advocating a government expedition. John Cleves Symmes' Symzonia is a heavy influence on the events in the more fantastic passages. Two facts suggest that this section was composed in late 1837 or early 1838: The new thrust coincides with a resurgence of public interest in this subject, inspired by renewed congressional debate about whether to fund a south seas expedition for exploration (Ridgely-Haverstick 231).⁴

The second fact suggesting an interim here is the alteration of Harpers' publishing schedule as a result of the Panic of 1837. In June Harpers announced that due to economic conditions it was stopping the presses for all books but "those that were well advanced by early May" (Eugene Exman, qtd. in Ridgely "Growth" 35). While they had received enough copy to feel sufficiently confident to announce in May that Pym was "nearly ready for publication" (qtd. in Ridgely and Haverstick 227), evidently it was not close enough to completion to then proceed with, and publication did not occur until August of 1838.

(4) The final stage, the "Stephens-Keith material," consists mainly of the first of two chapters numbered 23 in the first edition, and the afterword entitled "Note." Ridgely and Haverstick present irresistible evidence that this linguistic material involving the language of the Tsalalians, the inscriptions on Tsalal, and the "Note" author's comments upon them, is a very late interpolation.⁵ They come primarily from John L. Stephens' Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land (1837), reviewed by Poe in October, 1837; Alexander Keith's Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion, which discusses biblical prophecies pertaining to "the dispersal of races to the earth's farthest reaches" (Ridgely "Growth" 34); and Gesenius's Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, which contributed words and figures.⁶

Not that Ridgely and Haverstick think there is anything to all this. Poe's intention as well as his text changed drastically, driven not by any organic, single design but by the sources he was able to access at different times, as he sought to pad, protract, splice, and piece together a book to answer pressing financial needs. Most sections show signs of hasty composition, and, despite Cecil's claim, are full of discrepancies and inconsistencies within themselves. The ending is the "lame anti-climax" of a hoax, with Pym dying after an implausible salvation, a postscript editor whose explanations explain nothing, "two or three final chapters" lost while "the above were in type," and a text that covers only one-ninth of the journey's timespan. The great white figure and the linguistic material are diversions to deflect our attention from a narrative that is broken off even as it was being put to press. Sounding like Barth twenty years later, they conclude that

"what Pym finally offers is not mystery but mystification, not a problem for serious explication but... meaningless complication" (237).

Scholarship since has tended to confirm Ridgely-Haverstick's account, with Burton Pollin's source and textual work answering many questions about Poe's reading and methods, but not significantly altering their model. An attempt was made by Alexander Hammond in his 1978 "The Composition of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym: Notes Toward a Re-examination." Traces of rapid and careless writing suggested to him a briefer, not a greater span for the composition. To support his thesis that Pym was completed by Spring 1937, he offers five items of evidence, involving several documents and their timing. Most of the discussion, for example, is given to the handwritten copyright entry Harpers' submitted on June 10, 1937. To Ridgely and Haverstick, it showed traces of late alteration, specifically the addition of references to the South Seas and Antarctica, substituting for a short original subtitle, which was crossed out and erased. This was an attempt to make it conform to the title page and the completed narrative, which was set to print sometime after May, 1838. Ridgely and Haverstick concluded that a substantial portion of the text as well as the final title probably had not been completed before Spring 1838. Hammond testifies that the only cancelled writing that remains legible is identical to the final subtitle, and argues that even if it were different, that would not necessarily mean it had been added significantly later. Moreover, the ink's properties were identical in all the writing except the marginal note that announced the book was deposited August 1, 1838.

Hammond concludes that there is no evidence for discrete stages and

the "many narratives" that ruin the book's unity. He offers little in the way of critical conclusions. Like Ridgely-Haverstick, he views Pym as a "hoax," a "patchwork affair" and a "failure." But he does argue that it is completed, and that the surprising ending is "fully in keeping with the patterns of deception and inversion in the book as a whole... designed to frustrate expectation (19); and he notes that the the implications of a unified composition process hold open the possibility of a unified design and a single narrative (17). While many critics since have acted upon this implication, typically they have not felt it necessary to repudiate Ridgely-Haverstick, on the assumption that a unified design does not require a shorter or single composition period, and on the perception that, while Hammond contributes important information that modifies Ridgely-Haverstick, he "falls short of establishing that the text reached its final state by the time of the initial copyright," as Moldenhauer recently put it (Kopley Poe's 76).

Burton Pollin adds to our understanding of the composition in his recent source study, "Poe's Life Reflected in His Work." Building on Ridgely-Haverstick, he indicates the kinds of materials at Poe's disposal during his career, and how they changed with Poe's shifting residence and professional standing. In neither Richmond nor New York did he have access to public or university libraries, or to the private collections of very many individuals. As for private collections, there was no 'literary circle' in Richmond, and he had little intercourse with that of New York that would avail him of collections there. Pollin demonstrates that his principle resources were for the most part bookstores, the private collections of a few friends, review copies of books that came to him at his editorial posts, and back issues of the

magazine for which he was working. Pollin's brilliant, original reconstruction conveys overall a sense of the astonishing poverty of resources as a negative vector in the composition of Pym especially, for which he was necessarily so dependent on others' writings.

Source Scholarship

The other great extrinsic support for the argument against Pym is source study. Reconstruction of Poe's sources has been ongoing and piecemeal, with many contributors. There has been recognition from the beginning of the influence of certain travel narratives, factual and fictitious, verisimilar and fantastic, among them Robinson Crusoe, Gulliver's Travels, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, and Captain Frederick Marryat's Peter Simple (1835). The nineteen-thirties and -forties saw the literary backdrop of Pym begin to emerge. To name a few highlights, David McKeithan established in 1933 the indebtedness to Archibald Duncan's The Mariner's Chronicle and Morrell's Narrative of Four Voyages; Robert Rhea (1930) and others later fleshed out the links with Jeremiah Reynold's ideas and writing, and the deep personal and professional connection Poe seems to have felt with him; J. O. Bailey (1942) developed the deep shaping influence of John Cleve Symmes and Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery, expressing the theory that the earth is hollow, and the interior was accessible through waterways at the poles. Randel Helms (1972) sketched out the extensive use of Jane Porter's 1831 Sir Edward Seaward's Narrative of His Shipwreck. J. V. Ridgely developed suggestions by Woodberry that Poe used Astoria, while Sidney Kaplan fleshed out Woodberry's identification of Stephens' Incidents of Travel.

Recent source scholarship has uncovered new influences and disclose an even greater range in Poe's use of sources. In "Poe's reading of Myth: The White Vision of Arthur Gordon Pym," Carol Peirce and Alexander Rosee III examine the conscious uses Poe made of myth. The authors discuss Poe's familiarity with the work of major mythographers, such as Jacob Bryant's A New System; or, an Analysis of Antient Mythology (1807), Charles Anthon's Classical Dictionary..., and George Stanley Faber's Origins of Pagan Idolatry.... Poe appropriated widely from these materials, the authors suggest, in order to imbue his text with a mythic resonance, and to graft it onto rich genealogical lines. They focus with extended analysis on Faber's study of Celtic mythology, and find throughout Pym numerous allusions and references to Wales, Welsh festivals and seasons, the Arthurian legend, and, in the shrouded white figure, an image of the "White Goddess," the ancient maternal deity in whose image all Celtic goddesses and queens were bound up. Developing a source first suggested by Woodberry, John Irwin (1980) argued that the visual properties of the shrouded white figure might have been inspired by David Brewster's Letters on Natural Magic (1831), while Selma Brody postulates a much more pervasive presence in the 'special effects' throughout the book, in her thorough 1989 analysis. Joseph Moldenhauer (1992) analyzes the possibility of influence from the Icelandic sagas chronicling Vinland exploration, two of which were included in the collection of pre-Columbian Nordic narratives that appeared in 1837, Antiquitates Americanae.... J. Lasley Dameron (1992) suggests that the exotic polar phenomena Pym encounters came from the descriptions of William Scoresby, Jr.'s factual Journal of a Voyage to the Northern Whale-Fishery...off West Greenland (1823). He concludes

from this that we ought not resort to the supernatural in interpretations of such phenomena as the veined water of Tsalal, the gray curtain-like vapor of the aurora, the shower of a powdery substance, and the iceberg-like great white figure, all of which Scoresby witnessed, describing and explaining them in his Journal as natural phenomena.

In 1981 Pollin gathered the source scholarship to date in his massive, annotated edition of Pym, The Imaginary Voyages, Volume One of his projected Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe. Notations, tables, and other materials fill 210 pages (~~excluding~~ the 153-page text). Patrick Quinn counted over 200 textual and factual errors that Pollin has identified or incorporated from previous scholarship (Ketterer "Tracing" 237); but even more than flaws, the notes and essays identify source materials, not only by the source, but by the **incidence**, sentence by sentence. (Thus, there are over 100 entries for Benjamin Morrell in the index, for instance.) By his **emphases**, Pollin speaks loudly of Pym as a pastiche of errors and purloinings. But in his introduction, he anticipates and tries to counter this impression: "It is unjust to censure borrowings in a book which was satirical in its parodic aims and playful and whimsical in its general technique." Rather, Poe's borrowing was legitimate and enriching within the context of his aims. He did so to parody the fictitious and purportedly factual adventure tales; to vivify an unfamiliar setting; and to "fill out a book for which the initial inspiration ~~may~~ have flagged" (17).

While his explicit critical statements are carefully bracketed in the introduction, they clearly grow out of his scholarship. Pollin argues that it is not Poe but the critics who have failed, in looking

for deep thematic unity and profound truths in a work with Pym's characteristics. Here is a text largely culled from other sources, so thickly that one-third of its paragraphs show traces of his sources, in verbatim copying, close paraphrase, or similar situations and details; one that obviously parodies many of the sources it uses; one that is replete with "many jokes and ludicrous effects." It clearly moves about from one narrative logic to another, as they become exhausted: from parody to shock to fantasy, etc, drawing upon appropriate secondary materials. Pollin sees whimsy and levity as the dominant effect. The fact that this view resuscitates much of the contemporary response (for the first time, after a century) is no small mark in his favor.

In the relatively slight intention evident from within, then, Pym succeeds admirably: Poe had a dual aim of hoaxing the juvenile reader, or anyone else, and "playfully bantering" with the mature reader; as we have seen in chapter two, both effects are evident in the reactions of contemporary readers. It is in this respect, Pollin argues, that "the extraordinary originality and individuality... transcend both his reliance upon a peculiar assortment of stimuli and the seemingly adventitious and even mercenary motives which produced the novel in four stages" (Kopley Poe's 95-96).

Textual Analysis

Pollin's source and textual scholarship will certainly endure, as has Ridgely and Haverstick's reconstruction of the composition process, useful for critics and scholars whatever stand they take. But they are of special use as support for the other critics who argue against Pym's merit. Robert L. Carringer draws richly upon compositional history in

his "Circumscription of Space and the Form of Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym" (1974), but he grounds his indictment solidly in textual analysis. The Narrative falters and collapses soon after Pym is brought up on deck of The Grampus. "The rest of the story is characterized by irresolution and its various symptoms: an episodic structure, a series of pointless incidents and pranks, and blatant copying from sources" (506). Every new start runs aground, and the cryptograms and postscript are contrived to "divert the reader's attention from an unsatisfactory ending" (514).

The problems, he suggests, are illuminated by our understanding of his imaginative predisposition: Even if financial pressures to write a long work had not been a factor, the narrative premise of a romantic adventure "committed Poe to writing a far longer story than he was accustomed to, [and] forced him to continually write against his own natural impulses and to violate what would come to be his most deeply held critical convictions" (506). The form he chose was one which was outward-looking, expansive, and open, and given over to self-discovery and identity formation. But Poe had already developed a negative aesthetic. The imaginative commitment that had emerged in his fiction was toward the destruction of identity—by means of physical disintegration, psychological terror, and the delimitation of space, "usually the diminishing space of a life-threatening enclosure" (508).

Moreover these were not only matters of theme but of technique. As Poe said in "Philosophy of Composition," "a close circumscription of space is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident:--it has the force of a frame to a picture.... It concentrate[s] the attention" (original emphasis) (Essays 21). With disastrous consequence, Carringer opines, Poe perforce used techniques that were

wholly inappropriate to the narrative problems that emerged. Thus, for instance, it is not the open sea and the Antarctic wilderness that poses danger but improbable burials and confinements; and Pym does not grow or discover himself, but is gradually destroyed, body and mind, and merely discovers bizarre phenomena he cannot interpret. Pym is thus marred by an unmanageable tension between the form as a whole and techniques used to propel the narrative, resulting in "a general collapse of intention" and "a series of aborted tales" (515).

In a study previously unnoticed in the bibliographic record, Richard Fletcher attacks Poe's craft in his Pym chapter in almost every respect, despite an otherwise high regard for Poe expressed in his The Stylistic Development of Edgar Allan Poe (1973). His methodical, detailed inductive analysis ignores entirely compositional questions, and thus serves as a kind of complement to Ridgely-Haverstick. His chief concern is style, which he argues is vague and elusive, with spurts of "purple prose at its worst." Explication of several paragraphs reveals an impoverished vocabulary relying heavily on a few basic words and their synonyms for an emotional effect, and generally careless diction, with respect to denotative meaning. As a protagonist, Pym himself is "more a name or a [Gothic] type than someone conjecturably human" (149). He finds Poe's narrative patterns here extremely frustrating: a tendency to repeat the same event, "often three or four times" (150); to present events or descriptive passages for no other purpose than "to maintain forward movement" (152); and to trace long, circuitous routes to get to a point (for instance, the series of nightmares and illusions leading up to the appearance of the dog), only to find that whatever symbolic import might have been

intended "in this mixed bag of goods is lost in a flood of Gothic and Victorian tears" (153). He concludes that Poe created "complexities of narrative pattern that outran his abilities to improvise," and that the "mechanical," abortive conclusion betrays the fact that "his own powers of invention finally ran out of steam" (153).

In another unnoticed interpretation of Pym, Stuart Levine came to a similar conclusion in his Pym chapter of Edgar Poe: Seer and Craftsman, dismissing it as "rambling" hackwork. He concludes that even as such it fails, and "no editor, even of the lower-grade adventure pulps, would consider publishing as... confused and ineffective a work" (238), though of course the sixty-seven American editions tell a different story.

3

Models of Coherence

Many others have argued for a models of structural unity, thematic significance, and a coherent and aesthetically interesting narrative logic. One of the first was W. H. Auden, in his brief but influential introductory remarks in a widely-circulated 1950 Rinehart edition of selected works. He chastised the academic community for neglecting Pym and Eureka, "among Poe's most important works," the former, "one of the finest adventure stories ever written, an object lesson in the art." In recommending it, he noted not only the variety of adventure, from natural disaster to exotic natives to "supernatural nightmare," but the way in which they were interwoven: "Each leads credibly to the next." Style alternates between calculated vagueness and "the minutest details,

figures, diagrams," depending upon the need to "preserve illusion" and "maintain credibility." (Carlson Recognition 220, 222). Brief as they are, some have suggested that these remarks called Pym for the first time to the attention of the larger academic community, stimulating the first critical commentary beyond the perfunctory comments in Poe biographies and source studies.

Structure

We have looked at some of the pioneering studies in this regard last chapter, and will look at others later, depending upon where their emphases locate them. For example, Patrick Quinn notes that by conventional formal standards Pym "must be set down a failure," but if we suspend these and view the voyage as oneiric and symbolic, a "voyage of the mind," we find a structural tour de force, in which "with no apparent discontinuities, Pym's voyage begins at Nantucket and ends in nirvana" (203). Edward Davidson acknowledges structural flaws, but finds a five-part organic structure that both symbolically and literally traces "the emergence and growth of the knowing and thinking self" (161). Harry Levin sees an archetypal tragic pattern of the dislocated, anxious wandering American, who moves from disintegrating society, to malevolent nature, to a glimpse of the supernatural, only to prove unworthy of grace (117). Sidney Kaplan sees a social, racial, and theological allegory of white and black.⁷

Later studies that emphasize formal properties in their discussion build on these seminal readings. Charles O'Donnel (1962), James Cox (1968), and Victor Vitanza (1974) advance approbative views of Pym based

upon structural analysis. Building on Davidson, O'Donnell was the first to develop a detailed model of structural symmetry. "From Earth to Ether: Poe's Flight in Space" (1962) maps an inverse parallel structure built around the Narrative's midpoint, Pym's rescue by the Jane Guy. The plot sequence leading to that event involves: Pym setting sail in a small boat (the Ariel) which wrecks, and from which he is rescued by a ship; confinement/burial (in the hold); treachery and the killing of the treacherous; and sailing toward the Equator in an uncontrollable vessel (the Grampus), from which he is again rescued (the Jane Guy). The second half works out the same sequence of episodes in reverse order, with the different vessels, treacherous natives replacing treacherous sailors, and the South Pole substituting for the Equator. He points to many smaller unmistakeable correspondences, such as the fact that Pym and Too-Wit react powerfully to a mirror each chances upon at identical points in the first and second half, respectively. These indicate that Poe intended his readers to 1) notice this mirror-like pattern; and 2) infer from it a physical rescue of Pym at the pole. He goes on to argue that the inversion principle in plot and structure is a key to the symbolic meaning. The rescues of Pym from all kinds of danger are ironic, for they don't alter the tone of dread or the certitude of Pym's march toward physical and mental annihilation. This includes the final rescue, for Pym dies upon return anyway. Yet the narrative simultaneously drifts toward Pym's supernal vision, the white figure, and Pym himself drifts away from man and "the earth and earthly senses" in his "search for universal being" (46). Pym's physical journey of disintegration, then, is an inverse reflection of his spiritual journey to unity and ultimate being. Pym is a dramatization of the conflicted

condition of man, an attempt to work out metaphorically "tension between the needs of the body and soul, unity and individuality" (43).

Vitanza, in "Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym: An Anatomy of Perverseness" (1974), formulates a structure that accords with the infantile- and fetal-regressive model incorporated in Bonaparte's and Bezanson's readings of content. He argues for a tripart structure patterned on the nine-month gestations cycle.

Theme

Numerous critics have claimed unity and merit for Pym on the basis of coherent and/or recurrent themes. In his The Rationale of Deception (1978), David Ketterer attempts an analysis of deception as the dominant theme in Poe's work, on the theory that Poe's core aim is to challenge the reliability of man's perception of reality, inherently distorted by three coordinates, space, time and the "subjective inner self," consequently leaving him "in a state of deception" (1). His analysis of deception as theme and technique in Pym adds nothing to the thorough treatment of this theme by Patrick Quinn. He reiterates (with attribution) Charles O'Donnell's structure, and then merely reiterates the plot, identifying and enumerating examples of deception (reversals, pseudocrises, ironies, discrepancies, etc.), right up to the final sentence; no larger point is made. He occasionally glances off substantive or intriguing points, but brackets them as a parenthesis or clause and moves on to another example, never to return. Tiger represents the "perverse tigerism of the world"; 'Dirk Peters' is 'Arthur' Gordon Pym's Excalibur; and, "As a hybrid Peters is able to mediate between the white and the black," all offered and dropped

without illustration or further comment (130, 131, 132). The Pym subchapter combines at least two stratagems for evading entanglement within the deeper layers of the text--what we might call criticism by reiteration and by parenthesis--though as Quinn and others have shown, his chosen theme certainly could have carried him there.

Josie P. Campbell offers a brief thematic reading, as her title indicates: "Deceit and Violence: Motifs in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1970). Essentially reiterating O'Donnell's point that the second half recapitulates the sequence of episodes of the first, she suggests that the literal events of the first half are rendered symbolically in the second. More recently Kenneth Silverman has argued in his new biography, Neverending Romance: A Life of Edgar A. Poe (1992), for the unity of Pym on the basis of a carefully interwoven thematic pattern of "the breakdown of order" (134), in which instances of physical and social disorder (the confused stowage of the Grampus and the mutiny, for instance) in an escalating intensity reflect the gradual disintegration of Pym's mind.

James M. Cox's "Edgar Poe: Style as Pose" (1968) is a slight reading emphasizing perversity as a theme, correlating Pym's perverse longings with Poe's capricious tendency to both disgust and hoax his readers.

Like structural analyses and thematic interpretations, studies of Pym's symbolism will be discussed more appropriately elsewhere, particularly in chapters three and five. We turn now to stylistic interest.

Style

Allen Tate noted that Poe's style was uneven. In his best fiction, such as "William Wilson" and the tales of deduction, it displays an "eighteenth century directness and elegance," and is "at its sustained best in point of sobriety and restraint." He could be "a lucid and dispassionate expositor,... capable of clear and rigorous logic" (Regan 47). But he was also capable of choking the reader with "glutinous" bathos and heavily-layered, even ludicrous Gothicism, as in "Ligeia." One could not, therefore, entirely gainsay Alduous Huxley and Yvor Winters in their identification of Poe's style with vulgarity and "ungrammatical rubbish" (Regan 48). Similarly, some characters are inanimate and lack dimensions of human sensibility. As others have, he points out the "unreal" and "mechanical" quality in much of the prose: "Everything in Poe is dead": furniture, nature, and human beings alike; even the classical and Christian traditions themselves are strangely devitalized in his work (Regan 48, 49). But if this reflects some deficiency in Poe's sensibility, Tate argues, it also reflects the peculiar "business" Poe was about. His purpose lay in the intense stimulation of sensation unqualified by moral imagination. This is the sensibility of his narrators, and in their terrifying world, they present Poe's proto-modern vision of disintegrative experience.

Pym, of course, features the widest possible range of Poe's style, including the unmoored subjective voice as intensely solipsistic as that of "Ligeia," all the clarity and directness of "the ordonnance of eighteenth century prose" that Tate sees in the detective stories; and the "sobriety and formal elegance" he sees in Poe's best critical writing (Carlson Recognition 241); one can only regret that Tate never

commented extensively on the work. There are at least two direct references: He implied that Pym fails because Poe's powers of verisimilitude fail when they are applied to his "obsessive" themes. On the other hand, he elsewhere commented that it contains passages "that have the lucidity and intensity of Swift" (Regan 42, Carlson Recognition 241). Others have noticed patches of brilliance, for instance in Pym's dreams in the Grampus hold, in the account of the deathship, and especially in the prophetic tones of the final journal entries. The narrative ends in a sonorous cadence that has been particularly singled out: "... But there arose in our pathway 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" (24.14). Malcolm Cowley called the passage from which this comes the finest single passage Poe ever wrote.

Richard L. Harp, John P. Hussey, and M. L. Rosenthal offer analyses of Pym's craft that emphasize style as a strength. The first two are rather slight. But in a recent call to a return to close textual analysis, M. L. Rosenthal offers exemplary stylistic analysis of Pym and "The City in the Sea" to demonstrate the possibilities of the inductive method in disclosing the affective dynamics of the elements within a text. In "Hurrah for Longinus! Lyric Structure and Inductive Analysis" (1989), he laments the current state of criticism, dominated by deductive theoretical application, in which books and articles neither quote from nor analyze the text they are studying. He seems to be saying of criticism what Hegel once said of history: "Instead of writing history, we are always beating our brains to discover how history ought to be written" (Philosophy of History, qtd. in Jay

Scrivener 277). But a poem, he argues, echoing Cleanth Brooks, "does not produce abstract meaning," and therefore the deductive method cannot arrive at the core effects of the individual work. Criticism should work in the vein of Longinus, and of the New Critics, attempting objective analysis of a text isolated as much as possible, just as a scientist seeks to isolate his or her object. Despite the fact that "our instruments of observation are internal and subjective ones and therefore affected by many contingencies... we have the same duty as [scientists] to try to avoid" such prejudices as "rigidity of thought," "private emotion," "personal opinion not based on data" (33).

He feels that despite its length and variegated styles, Pym essentially should not be read differently than a lyric; in both cases "you're observing bodies of language streaming through time and gathering shape as they move toward a state of equilibrium within a contained process" (32). Pym is a masterwork, he feels, with a deliberate, inner logic. Using not smooth progression, but startling transitions and episodes each discrete enough to have its own "separate emotional maelstrom," Poe "catapults" Pym and the reader in escalating intensity toward "irreversible disaster" (41). As varied as the experiences are, the narrative gets its bearings from the two "most terror-drenched passages," the Dutch deathship and the Tsalal episode. They are a sort of ground-zero for the two principal, escalating counterpressures driving Pym and the narrative, the "external pressure" rushing Pym toward disaster and death, creating the sense of dread; and the internal drive impelling Pym forward, in his perverse longing for fear, suffering, and ultimately death. Both result in progressive "loss of control, understanding, and finally identify" (42). Rosenthal

examines individual passages to demonstrate how Poe carefully modulates this tension with alternating styles.

Narrative Strategy

Clearly Rosenthal's stylistic analysis serves a set of ideas about Poe's narrative strategy. A final kind of formal analysis we will look at produces models of narrative logic and Poe's strategies in moving his narrative and generating plot. The boundary between these and O'Donnell's, Vitanza's and others' structural 'maps' is conceptual rather than empirical; but in general they go beyond these rather static schemata, as, for instance, physiology might be said to go beyond anatomy. These studies generally come later and benefit from structuralist theory, and they tend to be more diverse, penetrating and lively than those we have already looked at. One of the benefits of structuralism is that it made novel and experimental texts more accessible conceptually. Recognition of diverse narrative dynamics has helped the critical community to revise even its most fundamental criteria, instituting the notion that, as Fish succinctly put it, "literature is language around which we have drawn a frame." We have since been more likely and more able to look at works, like Pym, which may not reflect traditional formal values, such as internal coherence and harmony or which may manifest and achieve these in unconventional ways.

Most narrative analysts, some of which will be dealt with here and some in Chapters Five and Six, regard it as a problematic, contradictory text, which engages the reader in experimental, even unprecedented ways. Every model envisions an ironic double narration of some sort, involving

satire, whether on literary forms, social practice, epistemological assumptions, or, in the hoax readings, his reading public. Though they typically equivocate, these critics are more likely than most to confront the core question of whether the text represents uncontrolled contradiction or controlled irony.

An important distinction in narrative theory which has helped critics to find logic within Pym is the difference between "classical" and "transformational" organizing principles within plot discussed by such theorists as Russians Mikhail Bakhtin and Yuri Lotman, and Italian Franco Moretti. In the predominantly "classical" work (the terms are Lotman's) plot arises out of and is tightly arranged by the logic of a predetermined end. Epitomized in Dickens, for instance, the classical plot is essentially disrupted tranquility that moves inevitably toward a stable social system; which is to say that it returns to its starting point. Transformational plot consists of more loosely arranged episodes. In a linear pattern, plot unfolds as it goes; or, more precisely, in the dialectic between foregoing episodes and the protagonist's momentary situation. Exemplified for instance in Goethe's Bildungsroman novels, plot and outcome are potentially unpredictable; both hero and society are subject to change, as the rigid moral and social order come under attack. The distinction is essential to grasp the modern novel, which, as Bakhtin points out, is grounded uniquely among literary forms in the unstable society and heteroglot discourses of the present. Whatever might be said of premodern times, we can say that individuals and societies do change profoundly, and over relatively short periods of time in modernity. New literary forms inevitably arose to reflect this situation.

Pym itself straddles the modern age. As Tate pointed out, the smooth, expository surface of portions achieves the literary ideals of neoclassical elegance and formalism. Pym himself embodies eighteenth-century ideals of education and faith in rationalism, as he systematically tries to classify the life forms and 'philological' phenomena he encounters. Yet there could be no more indeterminate text. To note just one aspect: In the progression of novelty and the escalation of terror, Pym's narrative voice becomes increasingly laconic, giving over the narration to diminishing journal entries, until it falls silent in the face of inconceivable experience. The postscript is equally silent about Pym himself and the nature of any transformation.

A. Robert Lee stresses both the indeterminacy and the double play in his "'Impudent and ingenious fiction': Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1987). Pym overcomes deep flaws to emerge as a masterwork of innovative design that looks ahead to Joyce and modernism. The "impudence," from Pym's own mouth, is in the double significance of virtually every aspect. Its formal features are all parodic: a mock-epic title, a mock-confessional preface, a mock adventure, with bogus scholarship—all complicated by the fact that, unlike most satire, Poe is playing straight up as well as ironic, making it uniquely doubly-significant. Certain passages appear conventional, until Poe turns expectations on their head: a rescuing ship turns out to be a "floating cemetery," a group of childlike natives becomes the hub of a theological "counterworld" where the "infernal" is uppermost (129).

The genius of Poe's fictive strategy is evident in his ability to move Pym through such complicated, multi-layered episodes without

accreting so much complexity as to grind the narrative to a halt. Lee suggests he achieves this with what he calls the "self-consuming" text, in which by various devices he "dissolves" episodes as Pym passes them. For instance, the episodes are given a dreamlike quality that disconnects them from what follows and makes both Pym and the reader forget them. Once aboard the Jane Guy, Pym dismisses the harrowing traumata of the Grampus "rather as a frightful dream from which we have happily awakened, than events which had taken place in sober and naked reality" (14.4). Pym's traits, perspectives, maturity level, and even his age change without explanation when others are needed for what is coming. Stripped of memory, as Pym moves south beyond the known world, both world and text become a new blank for "total invention" and Poe's own "pure enciphers" (127). Lee does not identify any such final 'enciphers'; on the contrary, he suggests in an ingenious but unfortunately undeveloped insight that the final white figure is another blank, and that Pym's story and his very consciousness is "eviscerated" and "put up for transfer" to the reader, who is "enjoined, even defied, into taking on the next stage of imagining" (131).

An insightful reading relating Pym's narrative strategies to the rest of Poe's stories is Paul John Eakin's "Poe's Sense of an Ending" (1973). Poe's central concern, Eakin contends, is "the problem of the soul's quest for final knowledge" (242); each is an experiment carrying the hero to the farthest reaches of consciousness, even to the point of death itself, and back again, with the "exciting knowledge--the never-to-be-imparted secret whose attainment is destruction," in the words of the narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle." Whatever form the quest takes, however, the narrative contends with the paradox that

knowledge beyond the limits of the senses and reason perforce will be ineffable in human terms, despite the desire.

But the power and success of what Eakin calls the "Lazarus fiction" is in the aesthetic conception of the "miraculous traveller from the spirit-land," not the divine information itself (244). Poe probably knew the promise was undeliverable; what he was trying to work out, Eakin hypothesizes, was the aesthetic dilemma: if the hero dies, we lose not only the revelation, but the element of the miraculous survival (e.g., "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"); if he lives, he must be arrested at some point on the threshold, and can only talk about an imminent revelation (as in "MS. Found in a Bottle") or he returns transfigured but with nothing to say (e.g., "Ligeia," "A descent into the Maelstrom").

Eakin contends that nowhere did Poe apply more pressure on this dilemma than in Pym, both in the experimental techniques in the narrative progression, and in the remarkably rich final image of Pym 'on the threshold.' The plot pattern is Pym's repeated pursuit of, approach to, and withdrawal from the verge of transcendence, varying in escalating intensity and form (near-death, nightmare, delirium, insanity, ultimately death itself.) Each is accompanied by Pym's obsessive attempts at recording each experience.

In the end, Poe deliberately creates the sense of incompleteness (even having the postscript author judge it as such)--a "sleight of hand trick" to disguise the truth that he is in fact giving us a double ending: "Pym survived--but he died" (251). Eakin argues that the narrative culminates in a rich, equivocal image of the traveller who has by now accreted a miraculous nature even before he crosses the verge.

Transcendence inheres by the "fiction" of its incompleteness and the fact of his subsequent death: Like Ahab, Pym seems to disappear into the beyond. At the same time, his return, however brief, warrants his status as a miraculous Lazarus, laconic but presumably transfigured. For this remarkable achievement, Pym deserves "a central place" in the Poe canon: In pushing Pym to the limits of experience, Poe "was pushing himself to the limits of fiction as well" (255).

Others see Pym as doing work other than that of a novel or romance. Judith Sutherland, in The Problematic Fictions of Poe, James, and Hawthorne (1984), argues that Poe is in a cat-and-mouse game with the reader, which Poe expects the reader to win. We have already noted her observation that the text folds back upon itself to undermine the very "structuring activity" it has invited, and so becomes a "hermeneutical nightmare" (14). One response, for instance, is the ever more vigorous attempts to solve the puzzles, track down puns, find the correspondences (which are there) at the expense of the "critic's dignity" (17). But she goes on to suggest that the reader is deliberately teased and deceived enough to rebel, opening up a new dimension in the work. Pym eventually betrays his own obtuseness, and Poe's humor, with his unwitting jokes and ludicrous responses to the events Poe confronts him with. (For instance, "Pym cannot comprehend the savages' reaction to four harmless objects--the sails, an egg, an open book, a pan of flour" [31]). Dread and despair within Pym's purview, and humor and irony outside it are the primary counterpressures, until the reader chooses to disassociate him or herself from Pym's perspective, and disentangle him/herself from the text. From that point on a peculiar kind of laughter obtains, though it is of the "grimacing," "resentful" kinds of laughter characteristic of

Poe, and of a partially-gulled reader.

Evelyn Hinz sees laughter as the primary effect as well, in her reading of a unique narrative principle at work in Pym ("'Tekeli-li': The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" [1970]). She suggests we have been reading it wrong; that it is not a "faulty novel," but a perfectly constructed Menippean satire. She posits that the faulty, halting plot is not the constitutive element of the narrative; rather its loose-jointed narrative is a consequence of its satiric aim and its encyclopedic representation of society, reflecting it back in a scattershot manner, full of jokes and laughter. In the largest sense, its "fragmentary" form and "wavering" control suggests "the effect of a disordered world" (382).

Bruce Weiner, too, argues against the novel as the paradigm for Pym's narrative logic, in "Novels, Tales, and Problems of Form in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1992). Comparing the conventions of the nineteenth-century novel with the sensational "tale of effect" form the English magazine Blackwood's was famous for, and demonstrating Poe's intimate familiarity with both, he maintains that Poe was appropriating and experimenting with the latter. The formal flaws of Pym, whatever criteria one applies, are compensated for by its importance as a fruitful field of development for Poe's craft in the horror "tale of effect"—as evident in the subsequent appearance of masterworks "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher," and "William Wilson," all published within two years of Pym.

Like Hinz and Weiner, Lisa Gitelman argues for coherence on the basis of Pym's complex interaction with genre. In "Arthur Gordon Pym and the Novel Narrative of Edgar Allan Poe" (1993), she suggests that

critics who condemn Pym on the basis of its problematic formal properties have failed to sufficiently consider the form and nature of the exploration narrative. The lengthy digressions, the discontinuity among episodes, and the anticlimactic ending in Pym are not irregularities but conventions of the genre, inevitable by the very nature of exploration. She attempts to show that Poe self-consciously mimicks form (in addition to copying language) from his pretexts to offer Pym as a typical exploration narrative, but that along the way he pokes fun at the excess and crudity of the genre as a whole. He effects ~~the~~ latter not only by his own rhetorical exaggeration and by the preposterousness of events, but by nautical metaphors with satiric reference. For example, the "clumsy stowage" responsible for wrecking the Grampus in a storm hints at a similar quality in Morrell's Four Voyages, the very narrative from which he borrowed the stowage material. Similarly, the lengthy digressions during the Jane Guy voyage constitute a "factual ballast," typical of narratives trying to earn credulity, which threatens to sink the reader. And Pym's obtuse, unreliable narrator mixes fact and fantasy--as the genre mixes fact and fiction--to produce a narrative that resembles "that hybrid of modern media, 'info-tainment'" (361).

As both an example and a parodic critique of its genre, Gitelman calls Pym a "success" (354). However, in her own discussion of the genre, Gitelman uncritically conflates the imaginary voyage with the nonfiction travel journalism from which it arose. Moreover, nothing in her essay about exploration literature or Poe's use of it will be new to anyone who has read Pollin, Ridgely, or Spengemann. It is doubtful whether Gitelman has done so.

Notes

¹The notion that the Tsalalians are of Hebraic descent, linking them to the Lost Tribes, is neither original with Kopley nor farfetched, being suggested by Poe himself in the Hebraic elements of their language. See Bailey (1942) and Ridgely (1974). Kopley's elaborations of the Tsalalians as a degraded remnant of a group of ancient "white giants" who continued southwards is rather fanciful.

²For example, one segment of the inferential chain runs as follows, including all evidence presented: the "shrouded white human figure" must be a penguin, for elsewhere Pym notes that the royal penguins of Kerguelen's Island bear a "striking resemblance" to the "human figure" (14.10). Since the ship that rescues Pym in chapter two is called "The Penguin," and since it would be "natural and fitting" for a ship so named to have a "giant wooden penguin" as a figurehead (none is ever mentioned), then what Pym sees is the penguin figurehead of The Penguin (Kopley "Secret" 209). No point, theme, or conclusion is adduced from either the plot device or its secrecy, aside from the putative structure it gives the book in tying the first episode to the last. Similarly, despite 81 notes in the third essay, I can find only two items of evidence at the core of his allegorical claim for the Tsalalian battle: the fact that Jerusalem is called "Ariel" in Isaiah 29:1-2, and the mention of "stakes" and "cords" the Tsalalians have pulled to start the avalanche that buries the Jane Guy's crew (21.7), "repeated" from Isaiah 33:20 which refers to stakes and cords as the metaphoric firm supports of Jerusalem. Incredibly, on this evidence and reasoning alone, Kopley asserts that Pym is an "epic" of the fall of Jerusalem, Poe's answer to Coleridge's challenge in his Table Talk (1835), that this is "the only subject now remaining for an epic poem" (qtd. in Kopley "Profound" 150). This is "The 'Very Profound Under-current' of Arthur Gordon Pym," in his 1992 essay so entitled. (The Ariel episode is linked, rather weakly, to Tsalal by the name of the lumberyard "Pankey & Co." near which the boat is docked: As "key" is half of "Pankey," "the Ariel is half the key to all of Pym" (original emphasis) (147).)

³For instance, the statement that Augustus years later would confide to Pym how he felt on the Grampus suggests that the death of Augustus was an abandonment of that narrative line and of an earlier intention--as does the profound changes in Peters' personality.

⁴Poe reviewed Reynolds' Address in January 1837 and evinced great admiration for the man and his project; and Poe probably received encouragement to make use of Morrell from James Harper, who had written to John L. Stephens on a book he was preparing for Harpers, to utilize their "plenty of books": "You can just pick out as many as you want... you can dish up something" (qtd. in Pollin Imaginary 9). And Morrell's

book, ghostwritten at Harpers' request, was the product of much borrowing itself (Ridgely "Growth" 32).

⁵For example, the second chapter 23 picks up precisely where 22 leaves off; and the reference the editor of the "Note" makes to the Wilkes expedition (Pym's veracity will be determined "shortly" by "the governmental expedition now preparing for the Southern Ocean") suggest it was written only after the Wilkes expedition was commissioned in March, 1838. Moreover, the haste evident in the many errors of carelessness unusual in Poe indicate that probably it was being worked on even later.

⁶In his 1974 "The End of Pym and the Ending of Pym" Ridgely suggests that this material also contributed to the "obscurely suggested" history of the Tsalalians as "derived from an ancient civilization which dated back to the dispersion of tribes in Old Testament days" (109).

⁷For discussion of Quinn see Chapter Three; for Davidson, Levin, and Kaplan see chapter five.

Chapter Five

"A Correspondent Coloring": The Historical Orientation

In 1992 the first book devoted to Pym appeared, a group of essays collected by Richard Kopley from the 1987 conference and elsewhere. In addition to many fine and original insights within the essays, the outstanding impression Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations makes as a whole is that the commentary on Pym has become hopelessly scattered. The collection includes a psychological analysis, source studies, structural formal models, a deconstruction, a myth study, a postmodern reading of Pym as a prophesy of Auschwitz, and historical analyses of nineteenth-century funerary ritual, of Pym's economics, and of its racial politics--nearly each of which seeks coherence in its own line of development rather than in converse with each other.

If the present study is to itself retain coherence, therefore, each chapter must be a greater umbrella than the previous. This chapter will entail the historical study of Pym. If formalist textual analyses sought to master the text by abstracting it spatially and temporally for a given poetic system of values, there has been an array of attempts to contain the text within a historical frame or a literary genealogy

A breakdown of the concerns of the historical critic reveals how large an umbrella this is. One textbook, for instance, describes them as: the recreation of the conditions under which the author worked, including economic, social, political, and publishing institutions and factors; the intellectual environment as a determining force; the

biography, and psychobiography, of the writer; the dating of the text; and the text itself (Handy and Westbrook 305). Clearly, every generation and approach we have discussed engages in historical criticism in some sense beyond the very real one of dependence upon the historian for the text.

Two motives unite the thirty-five or so studies in this chapter: First, recognizing, as H. Aram Veesser puts it, that "every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices" (x), these critics tend to be conscious of the historical determination of language. Their commitment to causality leads them to conclude that we cannot hope to finally understand it by trying to abstract it. As Roy H. Pearce put it,

Insofar as language creates, the fact of creation is inextricable from the point in time of its creation.... The work of art may well live forever as the creation of a man like other men before and after him. But an integral part of its life, of its formal quality, will derive from the fact that it was created at a time, and for a time.... [it] can never be dissociated from either the time in which it was made or the time in which it is known (360).

Historicist critics take to task any system that tries to dissociate the text, but their original opposition was to the Romantic notion that the genius produced without mundane influence, his/her work engendered solely from the individual imagination, or a divine cause behind it. Melville made much the same point over a century ago, in his early probings into the shape of a national literature, when he said "great geniuses are parts of the times; they themselves are the times; and possess a correspondent coloring" (2166).

Second, in these approaches, as much as any, we can see Pym appropriated for historical or critical agendas comprehending far more than one text; elucidation of the text is a means, not the end. Frequently we see it engaged in a symbiotic (at best; at worst, tautological) relationship with the book or theory within which it is situated: for instance, Pym accrues meaning and merit by its envelopment within a coherent model, which it helps to make coherent by its support as an example. Many of the studies radiate from--or at least stand in some relation to--one of two nodes, national cultural theory and international romanticism.

1

American Literary Historiography

Political and Cultural Idealism

The New Critical poetic discourse which shaped much of the commentary in the previous chapter occurred against the backdrop of American literary historiography, a larger scholarly-critical enterprise at the heart of the nation's cultural self-image. In one sense it dates back to the early nineteenth century, with Emerson's, William Ellery Channing's, Margaret Fuller's and others' reflections upon a national cultural identity; but it did not take its definitive shape until the early- and mid-twentieth century, with such works as V. L. Parrington's Main Currents in American Thought (1927-30), Norman Foerster's The Reinterpretation of American Literature (1928), F. O. Matthiessen's American Renaissance (1941), Henry Nash Smith's Virgin Land (1950),

Charles Feidelson's Symbolism in American Literature (1953), several volumes by Perry Miller, and others. These and those that followed were concerned with defining a distinctly American literary tradition and distinguishing uniquely American cultural and historical patterns or 'myths.' At the same time, it was trying to establish itself as a criticism with its own language, criteria, and methodology, independent of those inherited from England, which effectively subordinated American literature as provincial and inferior. Despite the diversity of models, common characteristics can be discerned among these traditionalists: They seek, above all, to immerse their theory in historical fact; they tend to refract American literary history through the American Renaissance; and, following Henry James' lead in "The Art of Fiction," they loosen or widen formal criteria, in order to save American writers and books that do not meet British criteria. As Peter Carafiol puts it,

Traditional critical standards (verbal richness, architectural and organic form) stretched themselves to accommodate the verbal indecorousness and formal irregularities of many American texts; and interest in the relationship between literature and America's cultural identity—between belles lettres and "life"—blurred traditional boundaries between strictly literary study and other disciplines and generated the American Studies movement (10).

The book of paramount influence, of course, is Matthiessen's, but not merely because he correlated the American Renaissance with European and classical ideas in a way that elevated rather than marginalized American literature, and not merely because he saw America's highest political ideals reflected in the literature--though he did both. What most

elevated the stature of American literature in Matthiessen's work was his marriage of New Critical poetic theory and standards with literary historical scholarship. He attended to the formal qualities of the text as no other literary historian had, and not just of poems, but of diverse forms of fiction and nonfiction.

A number of literary historians argue that Pym is a representative, and even a seminal text in the development of American literature. Harry Levin sums up this stand in his remark that the "characteristic point of view in American fiction may well be that of an adolescent initiated to manhood by the impact of his adventures," and it is not "sufficiently appreciated that all of these [the young heroes of Melville, Twain, Crane, Faulkner, and Hemingway] have as their archetypal predecessor... Pym" (109). William Spengemann calls Pym, with its marriage of travel writing, Romantic fiction, and American materials, "the first truly American novel" (139). Paul Zweig, in his study of the adventure story in Western literature, credits Pym as the founding of a "new mythology of adventure" in America (17). And Robert Carringer calls it "an early version of the characteristic American romance," in which Poe pioneered a number of conventions by his experimentations with extended first-person strategies, the archetypal interracial companionship, and the narrative tension between an outgoing voyage and an introspective hero in a process of self-discovery. Finally, most of those studies which have delineated Pym's influence on Moby-Dick and Melville's other fiction either assume or conclude that Pym is a kind of imaginative fountainhead for that preeminent text, and through it for American literature.¹

Mining this vein, John Stroupe in "Poe's Imaginary Voyage: Pym as

Hero" takes issue with those who have regarded Pym as an atypical adventure romance, and Pym as an atypical hero, in his passivity, lack of maturation, and perversity. Stroupe argues that Pym in fact embodies all the cultural values and virtues of the quintessential American romantic hero. In assuming control of the Jane Guy, and surviving a mutiny, a shipwreck, and a massacre, he proves himself to be a man of action, and displays self-reliance, courage, and mental and physical superiority. Typically, he also stands for his community as a representative man, "a universalizing symbol of man's conflict with death and the desire to affirm his own existence" (320). In "'Mr. Pym' and 'Mr. Poe': The Two Narrators of 'Arthur Gordon Pym'" (1974), John P. Hussey also nominates Pym for heroic status, arguing that his adventures prepare him for his ultimate confrontation with death. Paul Zweig develops a similar logic in a lengthy analysis unnoticed in Pym studies, in his The Adventurer: The Fate of Adventure in the Western World (1973). He links Pym to Odysseus, Gilgamesh, and Beowulf behind him, and a genealogy of American figures ahead of him as heroes obsessed with adventure for its own sake. It is his "destiny" to transgress laws, rules, and conventions in order to create the "ecstasy" he derives from action and danger. Zweig has a deep appreciation for the sheer excitement of the story, and captures the sense of rapid movement and kaleidoscopic sensation it generates.

Pym is marshalled by American theorists with other angles of vision as well. Some have seen parallels between Poe's or his narrators' relentless quest for new knowledge, and America's characteristic pioneering impulse, though Poe often has been ignored in this respect.² William Carlos Williams said eloquently that Poe's

"greatness is in that he turned his back and faced inland, to originality, with the identical gesture of a Boone" (226). In his The Grand and the Fair: Poe's Landscape Aesthetics and Pictorial Techniques (1984), Kent Ljungquist demonstrates Poe's wide and varied engagement with the literature of the wilderness and the frontier. Indeed, a critic and editor of the time could have hardly avoided it, but Ljungquist surveys Poe's surprisingly numerous reviews of western travel books, frontier fiction, and nature poetry to support his impressive claim that no writer "displays greater knowledge" or was "more deeply immersed" in the materials and imagery of the American landscape than Poe (3).

A number of literary histories seem to have been built primarily upon Frederick Jackson Turner's 1898 thesis identifying the frontier as the most significant shaping force in American society. In Frontier: American Literature and the American West (1965), Edwin Fussell employs two familiar elements within Pym to coordinate it precisely within this tradition: the South Seas setting, along with the Jane Guy's trading and exploring mission there, as a continuation of the frontier enterprise; and the chain of concrete allusions to the West, including Pym's reading of Lewis and Clark's journals, the studied similarities between the Tsalalians and the "barbarous" Indians, and the western associations of Peters: his "Upsaroka" heritage, his home on the frontier, his Bowie knife, and that fancy grizzly bear toupé. Ignoring everything but these familiar signals, Fussell rather dramatically recasts the text for service to his own thesis.

Similarly, Leslie Fiedler observed that "all the attributes of the highbrow Western are present in [Poe's] novel: the rejection of the

family and of the world of women, the secret evasion from home and the turning to the open sea... [and] to the world of pure male companionship" (393). In an unnoticed discussion of Pym in his James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction (1973), Thomas Philbrick positions Pym at the heart of the impressive body of nautical stories and novels of the "maritime frontier," inspired by contemporaneous activity in the Pacific, the South Seas, and elsewhere (175). As a coherent whole, the book does not impress Philbrick. It fails, in part because Poe's own limited experience on the sea resulted in a narrative whose nautical materials are by turns copied, fudged, and muddled. Worse, as a whole the novel is "warped" by Poe's apparent aim "beyond the scope of realism" toward some "larger meaning... in symbolic terms" that remains enigmatic and unachieved (175). Refusing to deal with the text in this dimension, Philbrick invests his interest in the Narrative as a compendium of forms of sea fiction: documentation and vraisemblance, as in the work of Dana and of the authentic narratives; a tone and diction of "piety," after the manner of Robinson Crusoe; digressive exposition on seamanship, pioneered by Cooper in the eighteen-twenties; and Gothic romance, as in the work of Robert Montgomery Bird.

Subversive Theories I: The Revolutionary Impulse

None of the critics so far mentioned in this chapter identify subversive or ironic elements in Pym. They minimize the potential threat Poe poses to their paradigms by suppressing those aspects of the text which constitute its difference. A more sophisticated and fruitful set of approaches to cultural theory have envisioned a dominant

American literary tradition in which subversion and irony are primary impulses. In this vein, Poe is far more gracefully integrated.

Melville first suggested, in a review of "Mosses from an Old Manse," a predilection in American writers for a questing after truth, and that the truth they sought took them to depths and extremities beyond superficial reality. Because "in this world of lies, Truth is forced to fly like a scared white doe," their work required a willingness to superficially deceive,³ and to employ an obscure, mystical symbology in their "probings at the very axis of reality" and "the secret workings of men's souls" (2164, 2165). Moreover, he locates these tendencies in the American heritage: "Certain it is, however, that this great power of blackness... derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original sin" (2164). He is writing of Hawthorne, of course, but Melville's other great influence, Poe, whom he never acknowledged, is a palpable presence, and in reading the review one is struck by the fact that the qualities, techniques, and effects attributed to "Mosses" are equally pertinent to Poe's fiction.

It would be almost a century before Melville's implications would begin to unfold. D. H. Lawrence opened the way in 1923 with his pathbreaking treatise Classics, in which he observed that the great American books both conceal and reveal the deepest truths of American experience. Lawrence argued that these subversive impulses were unconscious, the irony unintended. The great American writers sought to promote a positive mythology of rebellion, revolution, and freedom; but their books register anxiety and alienation. In denying their past and their traditional cultural identity, Lawrence feels, Americans have

squandered the opportunity the New World has provided western man to revitalize his interrelationships with his social and natural landscapes. In the characteristic American postures of rebellion, flight, and racist violence, Lawrence sees a repression of the passionate self he calls the "blood conscious," denied by ideas that reconceptualize human identity and relationships abstractly: democracy, reason, freedom, abstemious morality.

In what seems to be an answer to Lawrence, William Carlos Williams wrote his own literary history, In the American Grain (1925), a profoundly insightful book that has been underappreciated. His model, too, is profoundly subversive, but consciously so, and to a more overtly hopeful end. The imaginations of great Americans, literary and historical, recognize that openness, receptivity, and originality inevitably entail destruction and abandonment of old ideals, particularly the repressive, values the Puritans imported. The resulting vision--yet to be fully realized--is a rich, cross-fertile field of multiple cultures, native and migrant, representing a profound and new reconfiguration of intercultural relations.

Though indebted to Lawrence, Williams' revision of his thesis is crucial. For instance, Lawrence's Poe chapter is flawed by a mistake uncharacteristic of him, if characteristic of his time: noting the homicidal disintegrating capacities of the Poe narrator, by which, for instance, Ligeia is killed by the hypertrophic, possessive will of the narrator, Lawrence explicitly attributes the psychic disintegrality to Poe himself, whom he calls a "fool" (73). While Poe's work, Lawrence reasons, reveals the truth of the necessity of "disintegrating and sloughing off the old consciousness [and] the forming of a new," it does

so negatively, for Poe felt only "the disintegrative vibration" (70). Followed by Tate, Floyd Stovall, and James Gargano, Williams was the first to correct this reduction, arguing that Poe was profoundly conscious of his disintegrative tendency, and that it was part of a positive mission. He placed Poe at the head of those responsible for a new American idiom and culture.

The strong sense of a beginning in Poe is in no one else before him.... On him is founded a literature--typical; an anger to sweep out the unoriginal, that became ill-tempered, a monomaniacal driving to destroy, to annihilate the copied, the slavish, the false literature about him... He emerges as the ghoulis, the driven back. (222-223)

While Poe's broomlike criticism gains most of Williams' attention, this analogy of sweeping clean to clear the way for a "serious" literature "of the soul" that is "not a matter of courtesy but of truth," applies as the core mission of the entire body of Poe's writing (216, 221).

Others have built upon the notion that subversion was the primary task, and irony the chief mode, of Poe's writing. In another underappreciated but extremely insightful essay, "Poe and Tradition" (1978), James Barbour isolates several strands of the American intellectual climate in Poe's day that he targeted in his stories: the popular notion of common sense in America, associated with Benjamin Franklin and Andrew Jackson, for instance, and the British Empiricist tradition that lay (in the distance) behind it; eighteenth-century scientific rationalism; and American Transcendentalism. Joan Dayan, in her landmark study of Poe, Fables of the Mind (1987), regards him as the apotheosis of a national intellectual tradition of profound skepticism.

She observes that Poe demolishes one plank after another of the structure of Americans' self-identity--common sense, reason, individual identity. On one hand, she links him to Jonathan Edwards and the Calvinist terror of eternal damnation, with Edwards' sense of man's innate depravity and guilt, of his absolute alienation from God, and of the absolute limitations of man's ability to know--in a world secularized by Poe so that it is unrelieved by the Grace that mitigated even Edwards' Calvinism. On the other hand, she sees his work reinterpreting Locke in contradicting speculative philosophy and, again, emphasizing epistemological delimitation.

A sophisticated and fruitful line of inquiry built upon the Lawrence-Williams paradigm of a subversive literature understands Pym to exemplify what Donald Pease calls "the Revolutionary mythos" at the heart of national identity. Pease's precursor in this is William Spengemann, whose Adventurous Muse: The Poetics of American Fiction, 1789-1900 (1977) offers an interpretation of Pym that is itself revolutionary, a landmark in Pym critical history, but one curiously neglected in Poe and Pym studies. The book itself also is underappreciated, but will come to be regarded as a classic. It locates the origin of the American Renaissance and a peculiar literary voice at the point of convergence of New World travel writing and the arrival of European Romanticism. The result is a "poetics of adventure," a uniquely American permutation of Romanticism.

In the Middle Ages revealed truth enounced from the center of the known world, the Holy Land, determined identity and subordinated experience, which must confirm or be discredited. Conversely, the Romantic mind imagined that identity and truth itself might unfold from

individual experience, even that of travel to the unknown, or at least from the dialectic between old structures and the new experience. The American Renaissance writers realized, argues Spengemann, "that the world America was continually remaking must be seen not from the unmoving center of the Old World, but from the places where the world was being continually made new" (3). In the New World travel writing, even then a centuries-old tradition, they recognized the perfect vehicle and metaphor of this process, as progressively westward moving explorers and settlers experienced the diminishing capacity of Old World ideologies to comprehend their situations. Thus, the Renaissance writers were the first to formulate a literature in which character--both national and individual--could change in ways that might be simultaneously unpredictable, nonprescriptive, and valid.

In Spengemann's scheme Pym is, as noted, "the first truly American novel," for successfully "reading back into travel-literature itself the aesthetic creed that had sprung... from that historical movement of ideas it generated" (139). Pym himself is the ultimate traveller and the absolute Romantic. He revels in defiance of the "domestic wisdom of the home," in his flight, in his wild choice of Peters for a companion, and in embracing sensations and desires which are contrary to the conventional wisdom of his elders in Nantucket. The narrative itself careens, as episodes seem to arise out of no organic design, but spontaneously, "as they seem to do on an actual voyage but cannot be permitted to do in a narrative that aims to communicate the ultimate meaning of that voyage" (147). But the narrative movement is away from, not toward, any orderly view of the voyage or the world. Pym's sense of an intelligible, rational world, by which he hopes to comprehend the

increasingly alien geography and experience, is instead gradually dismantled in the encounter, leaving him profoundly alone and disoriented. Within the confines of this irrational world, knowledge, so fervently sought by Pym, becomes equated with insanity; the distinction between reality and projected fantasy becomes blurred and ultimately irrelevant; and truth itself is "displaced" from the "orderly public world of the narrator to the traveler's disordered mind, from home to the nether reaches of the voyage, and from the meaning of experience to experience itself" (146).

Of the entire body of domestic literary conventions Poe subverts to achieve these effects, the outstanding one is his play with the point of view, particularly in the dynamic between the "two" Pym. Spengemann documents the crucial shift—within the text—from the returned traveller's retrospective account, to the linear, present-tense perspective of the traveller en route. Readers find themselves gradually deprived of the reassuring, mediating voice of the former, and therefore of any sense of narratorial or authorial design or predetermined end. Thus, the reader comes to be as unsettled and uncertain as the travelling Pym. He/she "does not stand on a fixed point of reason and trace Pym's wanderings away from that point; he moves with Pym through an increasingly irrational world toward the greatest mystery of all, which remains unexplained" (141).

Poe achieves these effects by a variety of narrative techniques so innovative as to proffer an artistic persona as radical as his protagonist's consciousness becomes. Spengemann argues that Pym's formal "shortcomings" are inseparable from its overall contribution, in the implication that "the only escape from domestic form and its

assumptions of an objectively ordered world lay in a gothic subjectivism so radical that it virtually disintegrated form altogether" (150).

According to Spengemann, Pym suggests that "our true being, our home, lies in an undiscovered country which we will create in the act of going there; that the journey necessitates a radical, fatal change in the traveler's mind or soul" (150). The ultimate contribution of Pym, therefore, is not in proffering a new cultural identity; rather, it offers a paradigm for getting a new one, in the form of a sort of allegory for at least the first part of the process.

The difference between travel and revolution as definitive principles of American culture is the difference between Spengemann's and Pease's models; but it is not as profound a difference as the imagery suggests, for they are two gestures of the same impulse; and they are both tantalizing images for the Romantic imagination seeking ways to establish the moral authority of individual experience.

For Pease, the central dialectic opposition at work in early American literary culture is something akin to R. W. B. Lewis' thesis of the "parties" of "memory" and "hope," that is, opposing impulses of cultural continuity with past traditions and liberal impulses encompassing the "Revolutionary mythos," negative freedom, and progress. While the latter set succeeded during the drive for political independence, it was bound to fail in the nineteenth century, precipitating a crisis of identity. Dominant voices in early America sought to negotiate this opposition in different ways within their own writing, but what emerged overall, Pease offers, is a "cultural

compact," a mechanism for incorporating new experience, and therefore change, within a cultural identity that nonetheless retains some degree of continuity with the colonial/Old World past (for instance, in the "haunting" past within the work of Irving, Hawthorne, and Longfellow.)

Featuring the open frontier, initiation, Emersonian self-reliance and self-fashioning, Pym seems on its face to be a perfect example of this mechanism as it operated in adventure and travel fiction: the traveller may present new experience, ideas, and a new self, for addition "to the store of a culture's memory" (169), so long as it is filtered through the reflective, mediating consciousness of the repatriated traveller. On the contrary, Pease argues, Pym is in fact a subversive masterpiece, a critique of the entire compact and the self-deluding culture that authorizes it. Pym is a version of Poe's dispossessed aristocrat and dispossessed soul, by which Poe expresses the consequences for a culture that has broken from its identity; and Poe's own experience of American life (or, from another angle, the modern world), "as a terrifying loss--of place, past, lineage, and position" (159).

Pym, then, is a parodic allegory. Pym displays neither memory nor a sense of identity. The narrative itself is a series of displacements and erasures: of home, of characters, of narrative styles. Lacking a reflective conscious, the prerequisite of memory, growth, and identity itself, Pym has no means of assimilating new experience. In a rich insight, Pease notices that Pym is so lacking as a conscious subject that he cannot exist outside the objects of his experience, to reflect on or represent them as objects; he can only identify with them, in absolute subjection, for as long as they are present. The compact is

defunct; Pym has nothing to offer his culture, which is destined by a parallel lack of memory to suffer the same fate of self-erasure.

Subversive Theories II: The American Gothic Tradition

A second line of literary historiography emerged from the fertile nexus of perceptions of Melville and Lawrence, discussed above, a genealogy within which Pym has been more readily perceived than any other. The first historian in recent decades to articulate an American Gothic tradition as a powerfully subversive, skeptical mode is Harry Levin, who introduced Pym into the discourse of American literary history with his The Power of Blackness (1957). According to him, Poe was one of three Renaissance figures who formulated an American mythology of alienation, anxiety, and tragedy, and a poetic that would inform the work of such later writers as James, Eliot, Hemingway, Faulkner, and others. That poetic entailed the archetypal pattern of the dislocated American, whose nervous, compulsive travels reveal the dark side of freedom. Ironically, rather than outward-looking and nation-building, this American psyche is introspective and anxious, aware of itself as a lost soul, or at least of the tragic side of life. Symbolistic and dreamlike, the books of this tradition pictorialize what he calls the "American nightmare."

Building on the observations of Lawrence and Levin, later literary historians would fill in the intellectual history. For example, in studies of the Romance and Gothic traditions in America, Joel Porte would argue that the peculiar features of their American forms owe to the religious terror of the Calvinist theocratic culture of early Colonial America; that the sense of alienation experienced by the

American hero that pervades the Gothic text resides in the general guilt of the Fall; and that the travels of the Romantic hero are both an expulsion and a flight from damnation. Drawing especially upon Lawrence, Richard Slotkin would argue in his study of Native American expropriation that perpetual, chain violence is both white America's original sin and its punishment, in a land it has transformed from the Garden to a "dark and bloody ground."

Fiedler, Levin, and Joel Porte offer the most searching interpretations of Pym in this line. In fact, it has its own chapter as a key support in each of their literary histories. For them, the "probings into the axis of reality" in the American Renaissance took the form of a symbolistic "night sea journey," to use John Barth's phrase, a Jungian encounter with the irrational unconscious, both individual and communal. What most interests them in Pym is a symbolism reduced to an elemental, chiaroscuro-like level--white/black; tomb/womb--heavily charged with both psychological and social significance. This they see as Pym's signal influence, evident for instance in Melville, Bierce, and Faulkner.

Taking Melville's cue, Levin applies most pressure on Poe's symbolic use of black, employed predominantly in the imagery of the underground and of the night, and in heaviest allusion to The Inferno and The Odyssey. He argues that Poe uses it to create a complex, inverted world, which Pym experiences as a sustained nightmare: The hero regresses to childlike passivity and to the mother's milk; blacks are rulers, not slaves; 'civilized' whites revert to barbarity and cannibalism. The South Pole is another of the weird and unnaturally lit settings, like Weir or Auber, which betoken knowledge, but yield

mystery. It is there Pym is 'saved,' only to die, a graceless salvation without enlightenment or redemption. Pym's inverted world thus exposes the bestiality of human nature and man's alien, fallen state, repressed beneath placid political and religious rationalizations to the contrary.

In his Pym chapter, Fiedler leaps over Lawrence's comments on Poe, to apply Lawrence's interpretation of other American fictionists. Fiedler focuses upon the pathological flight of the archetypal American hero from society and "adult heterosexual love" and the sublimation of his passion into substitute emotions--principally the adoration of nature and the ambivalent feelings of sentimentality and hatred toward the non-white. Pym is both fulfillment and parody of this conventional pattern. Fiedler notes the rich ambiguities of Peters as vicious "ogre" and an intimate companion with homoerotic overtones; a "dusky fiend" and Pym's gentle savior. Fiedler calls the erotically-charged cliffside incident the climax of the novel, for it represents the culmination of their "holy marriage":

my whole soul was pervaded with a longing to fall; a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable.... But now a voice screamed within my ears; a dusky, fiendish and filmy figure stood immediately beneath me; and, sighing, I sank down with a bursting heart, and plunged within its arms. (24.3)

But unlike other American writers, Poe reveals that this "marriage," like so much else Pym thinks he is sure of, is a sham: "The sought-for embrace is a rape and a betrayal, a prelude to certain death"--a death, moreover, without grace or rebirth (396).

Porte argues in The American Romance that American writers have preferred the Romance to the novel for the richer possibilities it

offers for exposing the dark and duplicitous side of human nature. For him, Pym's nearest antecedent would be Paradise Lost, for the sense of doom and guilt, "unexpiable and unremitting," that pursues Pym like a demon in Poe's "theological fable." This presence is rooted in the fall from innocence into adulthood and duality ("Religious Terror" 9). For Porte, as for Lawrence, the key writers of American romance were, like Milton, by no means innocent purveyors of an untainted American paradise, and the archetypal American was less like Adam than Cain. Pym is an American pilgrim whose wilderness journey is not an initiation into "the sweet reasonableness" of a universe "ultimately explicable," but one that "stalk[s] the darkest aspects of the self and suggests how fatal the American experience may ultimately prove to be" (Romance 85).

Others who have followed in this line have added little. In an unnoticed discussion in her The Journey Narrative in American Literature (1978), Janis P. Stout describes Pym as a "night journey" full of deception, confusion, and ambiguity. It carries him to a "new level of consciousness," but one based upon gained knowledge of "the destructive and guilty darkness" of man's true nature. (93). Therefore, unlike Odysseus's or Aeneas's quests, Pym's is neither "integrative or restorative," and leaves him "alienated and frenzied" (95). Scott Donaldson's unnoticed discussion, in his American Literature (1978), argues that in Pym Poe undermines the ordinary perception of reality by "ominous symbols" of purity or innocence that turn into horrifying experience. Citing Tiger, the Tsalalians, and the "white menace" at the Pole, Donaldson links these along with symbols in James' and Melville's fiction to a deceptive symbolism of the American landscape, in which inviting, virginal images turn menacing. The story as a whole

"underline[s] [Poe's] own nihilistic philosophy. Nothing is knowable, nothing is what it seems" (94). David Reynolds' taxonomic comments on Pym belong here as well. His analysis of the roots of American classics in popular literature, Beneath the American Renaissance (1989), discussed in chapter two, is the most detailed reconstruction of the popular literature of Poe's time. He fleshes out, for instance, a substantial body of subversive fiction he calls "Dark Adventure," to which Pym belongs, along with work by George Lippard, William Gilmore Simms, Robert Montgomery Bird, George Thompson, and others. Purveyors of "a pornography of violence," these writers "gave such primacy to violence and irrationalism that the forces of darkness shattered those of moral rectitude" (188, 191). His brief analysis of Pym and other such texts reveal, if anything, that the former was rather typical, even "tame" compared to some.

2

Social History

As Frank Lentricchia points out, "Literature makes something happen.... The literary is always the taking of position and simultaneously the exercising of position with and upon the social field" (Social 156). In the most concrete application of this principle, several critics have approached Pym from the standpoint of its direct engagement with social and political issues of its day, in studies that have found Poe to be either a cultural critic, or conservative and complicit in practices upon which it comments.

Slavery and Racism

Among the most salient of social facts in the 1830's, in addition to slavery itself, were the commencement of the Abolitionist movement's full-scale assault on slavery, and the South's response. In the decade that saw the appearance of William Loyd Garrison's The Liberator and Theodore Weld's The Bible Against Slavery, the formation of the American Antislavery Society, the upshifting of the Underground Railroad, and a wide range of Northern state legislation assisting fugitives, the South mobilized its cultural forces into a uniform voice in defense against what it regarded as "an all-out offensive war," as one historian put it (Franklin 254). Throughout the Southern publishing world, pamphlet and book publishers, magazine editors, and writers of every discipline were under intense pressure from some combination of law, personal conviction, and above all public opinion to glorify Southern society and its ideals, and to defend slavery. By the late 1830's, "a Southerner had to think in certain grooves," as Samuel Eliot Morison put it; simply, "slavery was no longer open to discussion" (265-266).

Of course the war-before-the-war was not only rhetorical. In "The Militant South," John H. Franklin documents the extent to which the fear of slave revolt pervaded the South. Insurrections in fact and rumor occurred in every decade prior to the Civil War, but in response to the apparently growing danger, with those of Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner, and others in the 1820's and 1830's, Southern society became to a large extent militarized, with state, local, and vigilante militias patrolling the countryside. One Southern pamphlet writer represented the general hysteria: the blacks "should be watched with an eye of steady and

unremitted observation.... They are the JACOBINS of the country, the COMMON ENEMY OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY, and the BARBARIANS WHO WOULD, IF THEY COULD, BECOME THE DESTROYERS OF OUR RACE" (qtd. in Franklin 252).

Numerous Pym commentators have taken the Tsalalian episode to be an allegorical statement on this situation; a few have made it a major part of their interpretation, generally seeing it as, for instance, an apocryphal warning of the nightmare scenario of slave revolt. It is a substantial part of Levin's, Hoffman's, Fiedler's, Rosensweig's, and Sutherland's arguments; for Sydney Kaplan it is the key itself: Pym is a political tract in the form of a fantastic "allegory of race" (162). It dramatizes the belief that in a world where blacks rule, primitive ignorance obtains. Worse, these primitives, who display the exaggerated features of stereotype, prove sinister, luring the white Jane Guy crew with gestures of hospitality into their deadly landslide.

But Kaplan argues that Poe himself is cunning, subtly reinforcing his racist fable with expanding frames of reference that invoke the main pillar of the proslavery defense, theology. Encoded in the white-black interaction established on Tsalal is the American master-slave relationship. (Poe signals us by Pym's description of his first sight of the island, which has rock ledges resembling "corded bales of cotton" [17.10].) But subsuming this representation is a series of references to Old Testament prophetic history, in the configuration of the Chosen-cursed contrast. An array of peoples traditionally regarded as descendants of Ham or otherwise cursed are invoked in the Tsalalian episode by allusion, landscape imagery, and especially the linguistic materials Poe introduces, in the petroglyphs and the gorge "writing": Egyptian, Ethiopian/Cushite, Arabic, Babylonian, and the ancient heathen

of Arabia Petra. To make sure it is not too subtle, the "author" of the Note identifies some of these by his translations. The most damning association of all is in the fact that the Tsalalians themselves speak a kind of pidgin Hebrew, and therefore would seem to be a degenerate, cursed remnant of the Chosen.⁴

Finally, beyond this philological material is the heaven-hell dichotomy, from which angle Tsalal is populated by demons and flowing with its own blood-like River Styx. Pym's final encounter with the "comforting white" figure, in Kaplan's words, is God himself, a repetition of the image of "The Ancient of Days" Daniel sees, whose garment and hair are "white as snow" (Daniel 7:9). It is he who has engraved "within the hills" "vengeance" against blacks (Note.9), implicitly authorizing their destruction (on Tsalal) and slavery (in America).

Those who have seriously taken up Kaplan's implications respect the linguistic and symbolic associations he uncovered. But there are fundamental questions he implicitly raises only to ignore. Kaplan apparently feels Poe left the crime and guilt that lay behind the Tsalalians' curse unexplored; Kaplan himself certainly does. Moreover, are the hero and the other whites totally innocent in a narrative rife with guilt associations? In other words, would a writer whose works are as morally complex and ambiguous as Poe's take the time to write a long narrative that is no more sophisticated than a propagandistic, one-dimensional condemnation of a race? Finally, what about the moral implications for Kaplan's unmitigated, race-hating Poe? Subsequent critics in this vein go further in developing thematic and moral implications of Poe's engagement with slavery in Pym, and elsewhere, but

by no means are they in accord.

It has been well-established that Poe regarded himself as a Southerner throughout his career, in his fidelity to Southern aristocratic values and his conservative (southern Whig) political views.⁵ His views on slavery itself have been a subject of controversy for some time, however, complicated by the questionable authorship of a review long thought to be his one clear statement in support of slavery (as opposed to a multitude of attacks on "ranting" abolitionists.) The review appeared unsigned in 1836 in The Southern Literary Messenger during Poe's tenure as assistant editor. It examines sympathetically two proslavery polemics, James K. Paulding's Slavery in the United States and (William Drayton's?) The South Vindicated from Treason and Fanaticism of Northern Abolition. Poe's authorship of the review was not questioned until 1941, when William D. Hull argued in his dissertation that Beverly Tucker was the author. In 1972 Rosenthal assembled data ruling out Tucker as a candidate, but went on to argue that Poe's authorship is not decisively material, for all the proslavery sentiments he expressed elsewhere. However, examination of the reviews he cites invariably reveal ambiguity, for in every case Poe's statements are directed elsewhere, and the opinion on slavery must be inferred.⁶ A number of influential Poe scholars remain unconvinced of Hull's conclusions. For example, Patrick Quinn without comment omitted the review from his collection of Poe's reviews; and G. R. Thompson maintains Hull's thesis, as he argues that Poe, a "true man of letters," transcended his locale: "Rarely does he employ Southern locales or character types; he does not embroil himself in the issue of slavery; he does not address matters of Southern autonomy and separatism" (277).

John Carlos Rowe has taken up Rosenthal's torch, and has taken to task the whole of Poe criticism in his recent revisionist essay "Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism." He admonishes, on one hand, traditional Americanist Poe specialists who historicize him, but downplay his implication in Southern racist ideology; and on the other, modernist and deconstructionist readers who see in Poe a protomodernist, and simply lift him out of his social context, and so implicitly exonerate him.

In his own reading of Pym he attempts to expose the folds of Poe's racism. The text is Poe's defense against his own "repressed fears regarding slave rebellions in the South and his deeper fear that Southern aristocratic life itself might be passing" (127). He counters these by encoding within Pym a sort of "white poetic," in which language and reason, mastered by white, civilized man, are the means of appropriate power over darkness: "As the 'enlightened ruler' of language, its rational governor, the poet works to recontain that savagery—the mob, the black, the lunatic—within poetic form" (127).

Building on John Irwin's model of representation in Pym, the inversion that writing is the referent of reality, Rowe argues that physical bodies and the action itself are "psychosymbolic." Specifically, what is recurrently symbolized is the "poetic enactment" of Pym and the text itself, as poet/poem, acquiring mastery (129). One of the two examples he elaborates, the cannibal scene, flows out of the mutiny, which he argues is a metaphor of the Nat Turner Rebellion of 1831.⁷ Pym's cannibalism of Parker reverses this valence, for Parker, Rowe reasons, may have reference to a "James W. Parker," one of six judges who signed Turner's execution order. The act, then, is a

symbolic "internalization of white power": "The poet transforms the threatened body of the White Master into the rhetoric of the white Poet.... Pym is invested with the power of the law, now transposed into the fictional frame" (129-30). One symbolic enactment of this power is in the narrative's disposal of Peters, a conflation of the Indian and the Black: for his good service against savagery, and for Pym, his "white slave master," Peters is granted his "just deserts," residence in the free state of Illinois.

Throughout his article, Rowe repeatedly calls for a "reassessment" of Poe in light of his proslavery views. He does not suggest what the new stance might be, but he gives some hints by couching his discussion in a tone of moral outrage that calls to mind the banishment of Heidegger and de Man (the latter invoked by name). Acknowledging the uncertainty of Poe's authorship of the Paulding-Drayton review, he argues that it is all but irrelevant, for it and other proslavery materials were published in the Messenger during his tenure, and appeared alongside his own writings: "we must acknowledge that the 'association' of publication in the same newspaper or journal can be the basis for a substantial case" (119).

Without trying to solve the question of Poe's racism, we can nonetheless briefly point out the selectivity in Rowe's re-historicization. Among elements of the social and biographical context Rowe ignores are the homogeneity of values, especially regarding slavery, in the South during that period, and the deterioration of intellectual freedom. Relevant also is the degree of control Poe as assistant to Thomas White exerted in selecting the materials, in a journal whose stated mission was the advancement of Southern letters

(Beaver 262). Of course even these discriminations are unimportant if we wish to assign blame by association. Poe could have quit on this score; he could have joined the abolition movement, along with Thoreau, Whittier, and Lowell, and even moved to New England. But Poe was not only associating with Southerners, he was a Southerner; and he was not merely living in his environment, he was a product of it. As such, and given the heated intellectual climate of the 1830's, what stands out about Poe's writing with respect to slavery is the extent to which he chose to, and was able to, avoid direct engagement with the subject—despite his thousands of pages of writing upon all subjects of the day. Almost every comment that relates reflects more upon his literary views: his condemnation of didacticism in the writings of abolitionist poets; his sense of insult at being dismissed by Northerners merely because he was a Southerner. If we then question why, as a Southerner, he refrained from explicit, audible support for slavery and for Southern positions in North-South political debate, we must consider the fact that he disdained practical politics throughout his life, and the fact that so far as we know he had no direct, personal involvement with slaves as a child or an adult.

Finally, regarding Poe's lack of dissent, we must ask whether the fact that he was ahead of his time and place in some respects creates an unwarranted expectation that he be advanced in all respects. A man who could accept phrenology and several other pseudosciences that were already then discredited might be more credibly expected to accept the racist science of the day which supported white supremacy.

Several critics in this vein find within the mix of Poe's attitudes towards race, slavery, and the South incipient criticism of Southern

attitudes and institutions, since, as G. R. Thompson opines, for Poe to address a subject was to deal with it "with duplicity or irony" (Poe's Fiction 9). In his wide-ranging, scholarly introduction to a 1975 edition to Pym, Harold Beaver corroborates and extends Kaplan's work in reconstructing the historical context and the race/slave significance within the text.

However Kaplan, he argues, has missed the irony. This intricate tapestry of white-black polarities, ancient languages, cursed race associations, and strange taboos and rites is itself a kind of cryptogram or hieroglyph, masking a deeper layer of significance: "This Narrative as a whole--if it really is a whole--cries out for decipherment" (270).

The key is Peters, an Indian-white "halfbreed" with a negroid appearance, by Pym's own description, who both symbolizes and prefigures Pym's own psychic integration. Pascal Covici, Jr., in his 1968 "Toward a Reading of Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," was the first to develop the symbolic significance of Peters, as a social mediator between savage and civilized society, and mentally, between rational and irrational poles within Pym's psyche.

Beaver documents the progressive psychic disintegration over the course of the Narrative, with individuals and races as terms for the psyche. Against this, Peters emerges as a powerful, mediating force. As a "dark hybrid" he is able to save Pym by his own deadly violence. "In issues of life and death, [he] is the middle or composite term... part cannibal, part friend, half lover, half fiend; a compound of darkest Petra and St. Peter that is a rock for Pym's salvation" (272). The salvation for which Peters preserves Pym occurs with the

transcendent experience at the Pole, "total, integrated experience, reborn to life-in-death" (273). Beaver's ingenious reading adumbrates a vision of social and racial integration that mediates, symbolizes, and emerges from psychic integration.

Coming to Pym from the fresh angle of her revisionary reading of constructions of race in American literature, Dana Nelson offers an interpretation of startling originality and insight, and one which must be reckoned a landmark in the long quest to grasp just what Poe is driving at in Pym. The World in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature, 1638-1867 (1992) decodes what Beaver and a few others were groping toward, a profound satirical critique of American imperialism and ethnocentrism.

She concentrates on the Tsalal episode as the site of an incipient colonial enterprise, with associations to every field of American involvement--the American West, the African slave trade, and, of course, the South Pacific (98). She shows how Poe exposes the desire for domination and exploitation that typically lay behind the seemingly innocent commerce Captain Guy proposes. The token trade of trinkets for supplies is a prelude to full-scale commercial exploitation (of the biche de mer mollusk), and a cover for the real dynamic of force: "We established a regular market on shore, just under the guns of the schooner, where our barterings were carried on with every appearance of good faith" (20.1, italics supplied).

But Poe's exposé goes deeper. Disentangling the composite scientific, commercial, and military strands of the colonial process, Nelson systematically demonstrates how Poe's putatively racist, colonialist text "collapses on its own structure of racial knowledge"

(92). She exposes the complicity between the desire for domination and the quest for knowledge, embodied in scientific enterprise of several kinds, and represented in the text by Pym's ostensibly disinterested record of his geographical and biological observations. Pym's record, like that of other explorers, will "map white access" into new regions, and "inform the public on materials and lands" available for exploitation (293). Moreover, the findings themselves, in a multitude of ways that carry Nelson to odd, neglected corners of the text, seem to encourage and justify such action. For example, the peculiar polarization of colors, the bifurcation of substances (such as the veined water), and the behavior of the wildlife around Tsalal, all reinforce a hierarchical "apartheid of nature," which combines with his observations of the "degenerate" natives to "document a 'natural' basis for white domination" (293).

Nelson then turns her attention to the ways in which Poe undermines colonial knowledge and sense of identity. Colonial identity is defined in the process of dispossession, the act itself an "interpretive will" inseparable from colonial interest. Its collapse is revealed in a series of ironies that expose the progressive failure of Pym's cognitive strategies. Thus, determined to see the Tsalalians as ignorant and treacherous, Pym and the other whites in "willful blindness" miss evidence of considerable sophistication, and bring about their own destruction by (treacherously) provoking the Tsalalians. Again, Pym inadvertently reveals that race is an interpretive political construct rather than a biological category, when his identification of Peters by race changes according to what will conform to his colonial rhetoric. And finally, he is oblivious to the deeper significance of the rookery

of Kerguelen's Island, despite a six-paragraph description. What he misses is the potential human application of an integrated social system, an encoded alternative model for American society and international cooperation, in which the albatross, penguins, and welcomed individuals of other species cooperate and contribute equally, each "enjoying all the privileges of citizenship" (14.18).

In some brief remarks about Pym in her article "Romance and Race," in The Columbia History of the American Novel, Joan Dayan interprets the Tsalalialian episode along the same lines as Nelson, but like Kaplan and Beaver, understands it to be more sharply focused upon racism in the American South. Thus, she associates the pseudobiblical "vengeance" quote at the end of Pym with a looming "catastrophe" to be visited upon the South for "the offence of slavery" (109).

Society and Economy

Five studies try to articulate a social economic critique in Pym, with limited success. In "Poe's Pym and the American Social Imagination" (1975), Eric Mottram begins with the potentially rich insight that the principle dynamic in Pym (and throughout Poe's work) is the tension between "the myth of the free individual and the fact of social enclosure" (28), played out in plots featuring dominance and submission, control and resistance. Social enclosure offers rational stability, but stimulates claustrophobia; free individuality answered Poe's liberalism in this respect, but leaves the individual vulnerable to "uncontrollable psychic, elemental, sexual and social forces" (28). He sees Pym's departure from Nantucket as a rebellion against the stable order of middle class values as mirrored in his commercially prosperous

family and the Nantucket whaling industry, values which become tested and exposed in the extreme conditions of the journey. For instance, the cannibal/sacrifice scene can be seen as both an outgrowth and a metaphor of the predation at the root of a consumer society, "or any system in which some men are cannibalized for political, religious, or economic purposes" (40). Unfortunately, the distillation of Mottram's analysis leaves a great deal of residue for a drop of substance. Any final statement is lost in cryptic, unconnected psychological, political, biographical, and sexual interpretive comments, and a welter of factual nautical events from the time that serve no purpose beyond anecdote, unless a smokescreen of ink to conceal the disintegration of Mottram's own narrative.

In a reading similar to Mottram's, Scott Bradfield gives his own interpretation of Pym as a political tract which registers Poe's strong anti-revolutionary views. In the Pym chapter of Dreaming Revolution: Transgression in the Development of the American Romance (1993), Bradfield argues that Pym is a touchstone of reaction against bourgeois revolution in each of its various overlapping phases relevant in Poe's day: class conflict, sectional conflict, abolition, and democracy itself. In each episode, Pym features revolution of some kind, which results in social chaos and unchecked violence, and advances Pym further down the road of personal disaster: Pym's flight from the orderly, bourgeois world of New England, the Grampus mutiny, and the Tsalalian uprising. As Pym progresses further from civilization, the orderly, rational arrangement of human relations is increasingly seen to be a veneer thinly concealing the savage, irrational quality of human nature. By fooling the reader along with Pym, Poe demonstrates how

easily we can be fooled by idealistic notions about human nature. At stake is good government, imperial expansion, and society itself. Bradfield's analysis is slight in length and quality, and while his conclusions are plausible, they could be more solidly argued if Poe and Pym criticism were part of his context.

Larzer Ziff's half-chapter on Pym in his Literary Democracy (1981) and G. K. Watkins' God and Circumstances (1989) are no better, and are similarly compromised by an apparent lack of awareness of recent Pym criticism. Ziff's has been unnoticed by bibliographers, but they haven't missed much. He regards the narrative as typically subversive of provincial and conventional attitudes: Both Pym in his rebellious posture, and Pym itself are an assault on "the venerable assertion of common sense and common profit" (84). Like Thoreau, Pym embarks on a voyage in protest and rejection of the conventional; and like Thoreau, he turns in his rebellion to pure sensuousness. Pym, especially, abandons will altogether, in "a quest for being through sensation" (86). But provocative as it is, the conjunction with Thoreau is fruitless for its lack of development. Watkins, in a brief book on Pym and Twain's The Great Dark, gives an occluded reading that is defeated by its texts. He juxtaposes the two books on the basis of their common project: Like Twain's text, Pym has been misunderstood, for it communicates not pessimism but an "intensely life-affirming" message. Each counters a "soul-numbing overreliance on reason alone," and the "deterministic doom" of technological and social progress that was threatening to constrict American society in both halves of the nineteenth century (2); each also uses a white symbology of transcendence, by means of personal moral development, beyond "man-made chaos to spiritual order" (111).

Finally, Alexander Hammond has recently contributed a brief, rather inconclusive essay, "Consumption, Exchange, and the Literary Marketplace: From the Folio Club Tales to Pym" (1992). In it he attempts to extend to Pym Michael Gilmore's thesis that the writers of the American Renaissance were deeply divided individually between commercial appeal to the new mass market (and so risking dependency) and an ideal of autonomy and truth-telling that might entail condemning that public. He regards the shift in mid-composition of Pym from a relatively elite market (at the Messenger) to a mass market (with Harpers) as a self-conscious condescension and surrender of control which Poe recorded in the text in the form of food consumption as a series of tropes for literary consumption. The most conspicuous of these is the cannibalism, a trope "emphasiz[ing] the cannibalism of the authorial self" (165).

Intellectual History: International Romanticism

An important juncture in the legitimation of Poe for American criticism is the point at which scholars, in the nineteen-sixties and -seventies, finally began to position him in the Western intellectual tradition. Beyond theories of national unity and the American Renaissance, he has been linked seriously to Cartesianism (Stanley Cavell, "Being Odd, Getting Even," 1984), the Empirical tradition (Joan Dayan, Fables of the Mind, 1987), German Idealism (G. R. Thompson, Poe's Fiction, 1973; Evan Carton The Rhetoric of Fiction, 1985; John Limon, The Place of Fiction in the Time of Science, 1990), Existentialism (William Peden, 1972), Phenomenology (George Poulet Studies in Human Time, 1956; trans. 1956; David Halliburton, Edgar Allan Poe, 1973), and versions of literary Modernism (T. S. Eliot, "From Poe to Valéry," 1948, John Carlos Rowe, Through the Custom House, 1982; etc.). But the most complex linkage has been the attempts to find Poe's place within some definition of philosophic or aesthetic Romanticism. As late as this development was begun, it seems clear now that Poe needs the widest possible historical frame. One can argue that he takes Romanticism well beyond other American Renaissance writers in key respects, and one must turn to Europe to map the coordinates that orient Poe's Romanticism. In this task he has been blessed with distinguished and persuasive voices. Edmund Wilson was the pioneer, with his 1926 "Poe at Home and Abroad"; but Edward Davidson's 1952 Poe: A Critical Study is by far the most

important document in this area, doing the invaluable work Matthiessen left undone in establishing Poe's deep roots in European Romanticism. Thompson charted the extensive influence of Germany, (Poe's Fiction). Floyd Stovall ("Poe's Debt to Coleridge," 1969) and Glenn Omans ("Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense: Poe's Debt to Immanuel Kant," 1980) contributed intensive analyses of particular influence, while Leon Chai in The Romantic Foundations of the American Renaissance (1987), has provided a deep and wide-ranging study linking Poe and other Americans to Romanticism and its roots in the European Renaissance. John Limon's The Place of Fiction (1990) studies early American writers within the context of Western developments in science and epistemology.

One of the characteristics of Pym with which many critics of all kinds agree is in the solipsistic focus of the narrative on Pym as individual subject, in a degree of concentration perhaps matched in the nineteenth century only by James. Among the concerns of Romanticism, possibly none is more germane than the individual, the ontological center of the Romantic universe.⁸

But that statement needs a context. Northrop Frye sees Romanticism in the broadest possible terms as the first major shift in the Western tradition, whose biblical mythology projected God as separate from the world, and human consciousness as distinct from nature. An imaginative revolution stretching back to the Renaissance and ahead to Modernism has resulted in the withdrawal of these projections. If God is in rather than above nature, then nature, not society, is the direction in which to seek truth; and if human nature has only sought to separate itself from nature, rather than being intrinsically distinct, then intuition of the individual subject takes epistemological priority over reason,

individual or accumulated. Imagination becomes not just a source of beauty, but of truth, a gnosis by which connection to the divine in nature is mysteriously intuited and communicated aesthetically. Poetry reclaims the sacred function it had in precivilized society: through the poem, or in direct reflection upon nature, the individual imagination of the poet and the reader effects a "reunion," broken by humankind's 'Fall' into reason--the result of which is particularity, division, and alienation--from God, nature, and each other.

Romantic poetry and the romantic quest in the broadest sense can be seen as an attempt to visualize reintegration, while forms of negative Romanticism, such as Gothic, focus upon the isolated condition of fallen humankind. Both categories grapple with the fundamental dilemma Kant articulated: the poet's persona and the romancer's questing hero are seeking a transcendent truth in the sensual world; the noumenal must be conceptualized by the very categories of perception we wish to transcend, such as reason.

Poe, of course, as Paul John Eakin has shown, was obsessed with this problem, and Pym dramatizes this gap in an almost conspicuous way: In the formula of Mario Praz's "exotic romanticism," Pym everywhere seeks out and crosses margins and thresholds, both in physical and mental/sensory terms (200-201); he sails beyond the geographic margin of the world, to a point at which language fails and consciousness itself dissolves; he returns with portentuous, mysterious writing; he experiences a sublime vision of a seemingly supernatural form, and disappears into the seascape over which it presides; and he occupies the gap between life and death, surviving yet not surviving this mystical experience--yet the writing, the divine figure, and Pym himself remain

silent; any ultimate knowledge, transfiguration, or unification with the divine on the part of Pym must be speculative, for no clear evidence is offered. A chief discrimination among those who have read Pym in Romantic terms, in addition to varying foci, is how they handle this obstacle to Pym's quest of the soul.

Visionary Readings

Davidson finds coherence throughout the body of Poe's work in the influence of Coleridgean metaphysics and aesthetics, offering pioneering studies of Eureka and other texts in addition to Pym. Poe's work is structured upon the neoplatonic world model which held the multiform material world to be shadow and expression of a supernatural, unitary principle. This "organicism" informed the theory of symbol and language with which he worked: the ineffable idea or thing is immanent in the symbol; the words and structures are expressions of the poet's imagination. Pym is an odyssey of an "emerging consciousness," in which Pym's consciousness is manifest not in intellection or reflection, as in a typical Bildungsroman, but in his actions and the world imagined: "This self-as-imagination begins with the real, substantial world.... Poe steadily defines and sharpens the point of perception until all else fades before the intensity with which a Pym-self regards the world and itself" (160). Like the poet's, Pym's quest for "self-knowledge" is an imaginative enactment. His words are "a progress of the mind and the imagination toward understanding. Words can create another reality, neither the mind's nor the thing's" (175). The odyssey entails a progressive reduction of world and self: Incidents of deception and illusion undercut his confidence both in rational perception and in the

material world itself; he experiences uprooting, and loss of identity; his self-destructive tendencies move him toward death. The movement of the Narrative as a whole is toward material annihilation as a prerequisite for transcendent revelation: "The search for the self is the loss of the self; the quest is the annihilation" (177). Pym's transcendence is adumbrated in the recurrent images of rebirth and in the shrouded figure, characterized by mystery, supernatural aura, and whiteness. However Davidson concedes that the quest "ended in mystery," for while he would seem to have merged with "the unitary principle," that term finally remains meaningless, for unlike other romantic heroes, he crossed beyond the point at which language could report his vision, "never to return" (175). Like Eakin, though, Davidson feels Poe, at least until Eureka, was more interested in dramatizing a process rather than attempting to communicate ultimate spiritual truth.

A number of subsequent visionary/transcendental readings do not deviate far from Davidson's outlines. Curtis Fukuchi's "Poe's Providential Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1986), documents Pym's progressive recognition of providential intelligence implicit in the world as he travels through it, and the purification of his motivation, from materialistic and self-centered to spiritual and redemptive. Interestingly, Ted Billy also sees Providence as the dominant force in periodically rescuing Pym, in his "Providence and Chaos in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1989).

Douglas Robinson, in American Apocalypses (1985), regards "the uncertainty of interpretation" as the "rhetorical focus" of the text, represented in the elision of Pym's transcendental experience, leaving a "gap" between the visible world and transcendental realm adumbrated at

the Pole. What Poe gives us in place of a verbal description, Robinson argues, is the final image formed by the merging of Pym, rushed into the gap, with the white figure. The image does not close the gap, but it "permit[s] a visionary habitation" of it; in other words, it does not resolve the uncertainty, but constitutes an "interpretive embodiment, an act of mediation that links the here and the beyond by containing them in a single image" (119, 120). Todd Lieber's Pym chapter in his Endless Experiments (1973) emphasizes the power of the individual imagination, once it is liberated from the constrictions of external reality and verisimilar representation, to create its own total, subjective world. The narrative ends with "the final movement into pure selfhood, in which the hero is 'saved' from destruction by the redeeming power of the imagination" (188).

Richard Wilbur, in his introduction to a 1973 edition, interprets the Narrative as a document of transcendence, with reflexive reference to both individual psychology and cosmology. Pym proceeds to redemption through gnosis, or knowledge transcending senses, reason, or learning, by way of a purifying engagement with evil, on Tsalal and in his own body. Reality on the material plane is cast off, and he is reborn. The shrouded figure is an image of Pym's new status, symbolizing "the coming reunion of the voyager's soul with God or--what is the same thing--with the divinity in himself" (xxiv). Julian Symonds' reading of Pym in his 1978 biography The Tell-Tale Heart is confused and indecisive, but at one point he comes to a conclusion similar to Davidson's and Wilbur's: Pym "is a vision, one might say, of the eventual state foreseen in Eureka, when man has become the Godhead" (219).

Kent Ljungquist unfolds in a series of items his interpretation of

Pym as a visionary text, one which evokes the sublime by exploiting the Romantic Titanism Poe absorbed chiefly from Jacob Bryant's Antient Mythology (1807). A general theme recurring throughout Bryant, one that apparently had some currency, is the eccentric conflation of Greek mythology and Old Testament prophesy in probing prehistory. Bryant ties the Titans, originally a race of giants, but cursed and dispersed following their defeat by Zeus, with the biblical cursed and ignoble peoples, inspiring in Pym both the great, shrouded figure and the Tsalalians. The Tsalal and polar scenes together, then, constitute "Pym's sublime vision [that] penetrates the mists of time in... one appalling image, the sway of history from man's origins in harmony to his degeneration into savagery" (Grand 67). In his encounter with the shrouded, white figure, a pristine Titan, Pym receives his transcendent "vision of the angelic world" ("Descent" 89).

David Halliburton's reading of Pym, in Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological Study (1973), envisions both a quasi-mystical union of author and reader in the act of reading, and a transcendent experience for Pym in the narrative's conclusion. He focusses largely upon Poe's techniques for replicating for the reader Pym's immediate sensations. His method is based on a rather mystical version of George Poulet's pure subjectivist model of reading. Poulet opposed to the traditional analytic-objectivist model the idea that the book exists as a sort of mimesis of the author's consciousness. He postulated that the reader reconstitutes the subjective "I" in his or her own consciousness, effectively becoming the subject, and so experiencing unmediated sensation.

Halliburton fleshes out the patterns that emerge from the series of effects and sensation. Pym "systematically" displaces himself into "perfect" isolation, leaving hometown, family, and friends. He experiences the terrors of circumscription of lateral space by an "infinity of walls," forcing him in a series of upright but immobile postures (261). Interwoven is a graded series of falls from this posture, accompanied by inhumations. His perverse longing to fall, such as at the cliffside--the "urge to risk all" and become "absolute victim"--functions as a desire for the ontological condition for salvation. The epicycles of descent and deliverance point to ultimate redemption, prefigured in his sensation after having survived the cliff descent: "I felt a new being" (23B.4).

Rather late in the essay, we find that Halliburton somewhat surprisingly has switched terms, from a phenomenological/psychological orientation to that of mythicized initiation; Pym inflates to heroic symbolism. Following his ordeals, "the victorious hero acquires a new mode of being" (273). His final descent into the polar chasm, in a quasi-supernatural "region of novelty and wonder" (Collected 24.4), occurs amidst verbs and images of rising and ascent, and represents Poe's attempt "to render pure transcendence" (278).

Romantic Nature Philosophy

A Romanticist reading alternative to the visionary/gnostic is "Poe, Pym, and Primitivism" (1973), by John Teunissen and Evelyn Hinz. It does not negate Hinz's earlier essay on Pym as a Menippean satire, but goes farther to suggest that it offers a primitivist message. The philosophic stance and satiric tone they feel predominates would seem to

link it less to Romantic literature than to Voltaire's Candide and Rousseau's Social Contract, though they do not make the link. It is a blistering parody of social institutions, particularly exposing the "exhaustion of Christian symbolism" and the inefficacy of Christian ethics. And as they read it, it certainly does seem more closely linked in form to Enlightenment satiric narrative literature. However, while Candide finds South American natives to be as innately corrupt and depraved as Europeans, Poe subtly idealizes his primitives as an innocent, vital, and superior culture. Thus Poe would seem to emulate Rousseau precisely as other Romantics did, idealizing nature as perfect and establishing the natural man as closest to perfection.

Teunissen and Hinz identify the halves of the Narrative as two stages of satire: the recognition of "cultural failure," during the Ariel and Grampus episodes, and the atavistic "experience of a primitive culture," and thus the materials for a new "symbolic idiom" (19). Most of the article is devoted to explicating the Christian parody--Pym's "doggerel" references to Providence in tight spots, while never crediting God with deliverance; the ironic appearances of Providence only after tragedy has struck; Pym's prayer in the hold, which becomes effectively a prayer to a dog, not to God; and several parodic Eucharists. They also expose the hypocrisy of the alazonic Pym, who pretends to represent Christian values, in his innocent love of dog and friend, and his opposition to the mutiny and the cannibalism. Yet he easily capitulates to circumstances, for instance giving over to cannibalism when the support of others he had "calculated" fails to materialize--and though he himself is far from starvation. The authors are not nearly so specific about supporting their claims for the

Tsalalians' "cultural, genuinely religious, superiority" (19), claiming that the ending "has symbolically explained itself":

Poe and the responsive reader become the true discoverers and recoverers of the primitive values by way of an imaginative journey past northern consciousness and its outworn symbolism into the "south" of the soul where the pure archetypes manifest themselves in a commanding symbolism (19-20).

Though John Limon uses very different historical coordinates, and seems a great deal more aware of the intellectual context, his reading philosophically resembles Teunissen and Hinz'. The Place of Fiction in the Time of Science (1990) offers a detailed, informed argument that Brown, Hawthorne, and Poe were American exponents of the concurrent German Naturphilosophie, a later movement in German idealism that sought to "appropriate" scientific findings into a metaphysical model (22).⁹ Building upon earlier claims of Kant, Rousseau, and Goethe, who variously postulated in some respect divine immanence in nature, the Naturphilosophers found in nascent cell and germ theory and other scientific developments evidence of the omnipresence of life, energy, and creative growth in nature, and reflection and action of a divine telos. Repudiating the Newtonian/Cartesian mechanistic model of nature, and reversing the laws of thermodynamics, Hegel argued that nature's thrust was not toward entropy and diffusion, but toward order and unity: its "purpose" is to "extinguish itself, and to break through its rind of immediate and sensuous being... to emerge rejuvenated as Spirit" (Philosophy of Nature 3:12; qtd. in Limon Place 90). Thus, as Schelling put it, nature is "visible spirit" and spirit is "invisible Nature" (Ideas Toward a Philosophy of Nature, qtd. in Baumer 279).

The convertibility of spirit and matter is, of course, the ground premise of Eureka, Limon's most important text. God is represented as "Spirit" and "unparticled matter," the ultimate unity of spirit and matter, and the state from which the material universe proceeded and toward which it is returning by means of the insuperable laws of attraction and repulsion (Poetry and Tales 1276, 1282, etc.). Schelling argues that the poet alone is capable of imagining this unity, and this, Limon reasons, is the basis by which Poe violates his own anti-didactic critical principles to present Eureka as both a "Poem" and a "Book of Truths" (Poetry and Tales 1259).

On this basis, according to Limon, Pym too is a poem, which he reads through Eureka and Schelling. He sees it as a dramatization of the same trajectory, Pym's spiritual quest signalled by his colloquial pronunciation of his own name in deceiving his Grandfather, spelled phonetically as "Goddin" Pym (2.4). The overall thrust is not diffusive, as others have read, but toward order and unity. The Narrative begins with particularity and division everywhere. The first three sentences initiate the pattern: "My name.... My father... I was born.... My maternal grandfather." On the Ariel, in the hold, on the floating wreck Pym's consciousness is solipsistic, signalled metaphorically by mirror imagery. But in the end, individual identity and even consciousness have been obliterated, as Pym merges with the world, through the symbolically encompassing white figure and the chasm. Along the way Pym has grown. He grows from "feckless youth" to a botanist, zoologist, and anthropologist, fascinated and expansive on natural geometric and architectural formations, such as beehives and the bird rookery, that suggest design

and intelligence in nature. The Tsalalians represent Baconian-Lockean empiricism, Limon reasons: they are analytic, systematic, clever. But Pym knows he must reject them, for they are blind to the spiritual character of nature, and so susceptible to superstitious fear of nature.

Limon notes that Pym approaches ultimate unity through polarities: the alternation of chaos and order, of willfulness and passivity, the magnetism suggested by the aurora australis, and the Pole itself. In a brilliant stroke he indicates the symbolic significance of the Pole by invoking Hegel, much of whose work is founded on the notion that unity is implicit in polarity:

In physics a lot has been said about polarity, and this concept has marked a great advance in the metaphysics of physics, for as a concept it is nothing more nor less than the determination of the necessary relationship between two different terms, which, in so far as the positing of one is the positing of the other, constitute a unity (Philosophy of Nature 1:210-211; qtd. in Limon Place 116).

Gothic Romance

The most significant studies of Pym as a work in the Gothic mode are discussed in the first part of this chapter. In fact, Gothic features are so widely recognized in the text that they are diffused across the criticism. Though it tends toward the skeptical, Gothic Romanticism is not so much a reaction against Romanticism as it is a different reaction to the same collapse of faith in traditional Christian cosmology and neoclassical rationalism. The hero's quest for divine truth and fulfillment in the face of this loss is the same. But

whereas the Romantic hero exults in the liberation of his or her own capacities, the Gothic hero experiences his world as dark, mysterious, and terrifying, reflecting alienation from a divine order and real or emotional isolation from other humans. One way to visualize the Gothic dimensions of Pym is to juxtapose it to other Gothic texts it resembles in some respect. I would mention three: It resembles Moby-Dick in the sheer perversity of the quest and the self-authorization of the hero; it resembles The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, as many have noticed, in its focus upon the agony of guilt and isolation of the living-dead; and it resembles Thomas Beddoes' Death's Jest-book (1849), in its preoccupation with death, and identification of death with knowledge of and unity with the noumenal world. No critic has noticed the remarkable resemblance, but in his discussion of the macabre in dark Romanticism, Northrop Frye inadvertently almost provides a gloss of Poe's obsession with death in his documentation of Beddoes': the omnipresent intrusion of morbidity; the desire for death or near-death experiences; the prevalence of grotesque images in which life and death interpenetrate (c.g., the standing corpse on the death-ship), which are images of the threshold (English Romanticism 51-86).

Oddly, the readings that retail themselves as Gothic are few and thin. Frederick S. Frank's "The Gothic at Absolute Zero: Poe's Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym" (1980) gives an accurate, serviceable enumeration of Anglo-American Gothic conventions as they appear in Pym, but his descriptions of them, and his diverse interpretive phrases for the ending are themselves rendered in such Romantic language (Pym enters "the sleep of white bliss or elemental blank" [28]) that he rarely punctures the surface.

In "Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym and the Narrative Techniques of Antarctic Gothic," William E. Lenz compares Poe ("MS. Found in a Bottle," 1833, and Pym), Cooper (Sea Lions, 1849), Melville (Moby-Dick, 1851), and Thomas Pynchon (V., 1963) for the Gothic uses which they made of Antarctic materials. Poe first noticed the thematic conjunctions of Gothic and sea fiction, in their frequent attention to isolated and threatened individuals in an alien environment where conventional expectations are frustrated. Like the conventional Gothic hero, Pym experiences macabre, nightmarish events, including multiple imprisonments, and fluxuations of consciousness as his world does not submit to rational comprehension. The pervasive whiteness signals this reversal, itself a reversal of the Gothic black as a symbol both of the unknown and of potential "knowledge of elemental being." Exploited by Melville as well as Poe, it appears as "a mythic locus of meaning, one that makes human beings utterly insignificant" (38).

G. R. Thompson's influence study of German Idealism, Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales (1973), is valuable and widely quoted, but the mechanical application of his Romantic irony theory upon Pym is merely an instance of 'criticism-by-adjective,' with a pointless listing of events or characters to simply label them "perverse," "ironic," or "absurd" ("perverse" appears nine times on page 182) (see chapter six below). His subsequent work on Pym is of greater value. Alethea Hayter, in an unnoticed, slightly Gothic reading, sees Pym as a "night-journey of terror" that perhaps "owes something to a technique derived from opium experience" (143, 144) in her Opium and the Romantic Imagination (1970).

Notes

¹The lines of influence they have traced to Moby-Dick, Mardi, Pierre, and Omoo are too many to enumerate, and focus on Melville takes us beyond the scope of this study. However, see Patrick Quinn, The French Face of Poe, Iola Haverstick, "A Note on Poe and Pym in Melville's Omoo," Poe Newsletter 2:1-2 (1969), 37; Grace Farrell Lee, "Pym and Moby-Dick: Essential Connections," American Transcendental Quarterly, 37 (1978), 73-86; Charles N. Watson, Jr., "Premature Burial in Arthur Gordon Pym and Israel Potter," American Literature, 47 (1975), 105-107; Michael Hollister, "Melville's Gam with Poe in Moby-Dick: Bulkington and Pym," Studies in the Novel, 21 (1989), 279-91; Kent Ljungquist, "'Speculative Mythology' and the Titan Myth in Poe's Pym and Melville's Pierre," The Sphinx, 4 (1985), 250-57.

²Chiefly, Henry Nash Smith, Virgin Land (1950), Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden (1964), and Richard Slotkin Regeneration Through Violence (1980).

³Indeed, Hawthorne claimed that license in nearly every preface he wrote.

⁴The first to notice these associations in detail, Kaplan provides a complete translation of the Hebrew nomenclature.

⁵See Ernest Marchand's "Poe as Social Critic," American Literature, 6 (1934): 28-43; Bernard Rosenthal, "Poe, Slavery, and the Southern Literary Messenger: A Reexamination," Poe Studies, 7 (1974), 29-38; and Jay Hubbell's The South in American Literature, 528-50 and South and Southwest, 100-122.

⁶Among Poe reviews that have been cited are: James Russell Lowell's A Fable For the Critics (1849); Robert Montgomery Bird's Shepherd Lee (1836); Anne MacVicar Grant's Memoires of an American Lady (1836); and Joseph Holt Ingraham's South West (1836). All are reprinted in Harrison; Lowell and Bird are reprinted in Essays and Reviews.

⁷"Like Nat Turner, the Black Cook strikes his victims on the head, testifying to the symbolic danger to reason posed by... savagery" (128).

⁸For this discussion of Romanticism, I found to be helpful Frye's English Romanticism, M. H. Abrams' Natural Supernaturalism, Mario Praz' The Romantic Agony, G. R. Thompson, ed., The Gothic Imagination, and Franklin Baumer's Modern European Thought.

⁹Limon points out that Poe's familiarity with Naturphilosophie and its chief figures, Friedrich Schelling and Hegel, were indirect prior to Pym, through Coleridge, Carlyle, and William Whewell; but he probably read them in translation as they appeared in the 1840's, for instance in Fredric Hedge's Prose Writers of Germany (1847) (Place 201).

Chapter Six

"All the Outward Signs of Intelligibility": Pym and Modernism

1

Context

Much of American criticism of the last twenty years has taken shape in the tension between two conflicting kinds of response to contemporary French theory, and in Poe studies they have converged with particular force. On one hand is the often-noted resistance to theory in favor of historical scholarship, and to French theory in particular for the corrosive effect it tends to have on the traditional structures within which Americanists have organized our literature, and by which we have understood ourselves and our past—for example, the Adamic myth, and concepts of progress and of national unity itself. On the other hand, we have experienced a "shock of recognition," to use Edmund Wilson's term. Poststructural methodologies such as deconstruction and phenomenology pry open narrative and linguistic structures within texts in ways that reveal early American writers, and notably Poe, to have had concerns and sensibilities surprisingly familiar to the modern artist and critic.

Along with Emerson, Poe has received the most concentrated attention in conjunction with modernism. Pym, the horror tales, and recently, the comic tales and Eureka have been particularly inviting to

modernist scrutiny in a number of respects. In this field Pym has attained its status as the chief text in Poe's and arguably in nineteenth-century writing.

One problem in discussing 'modern Poe,' as R. C. De Prosopo calls the field in his review of several books, is the lack of a single meaning for the term. De Prosopo complains that the modern readings of Poe in general tend to be unoriginal and redundant, "communicating little beyond an obsessive display of their own tendencies," and he may well be right within the rather narrow bounds that he draws (49). But he dismisses any recent reading which does not deconstruct metaphysical presence, such as the recent "revisionist historiography" of Quentin Skinner and others, as "antiquarian" and "reactionary" (58). Perhaps, as Frank Kermode suggests, we should speak of modernisms (Bradbury 34). In any case, whether we consider modernism in America as a fairly well-defined historical moment during the early twentieth century, as a longer movement beginning with the American Revolution (Pease 7-8) or the American Renaissance (Feidelson 5, 43, 75; Riddel 124), or as an essentially ahistorical "desire" for a discontinuity with a past, as Paul de Man defines it (149), we cannot assume historicization of Poe is 'other-than-modern,' to use DeProsopo's term.

This study will premise a broader conception of what constitutes modernism. Fundamentally, it is the social and intellectual breakdown of the categories of order western cultures had been formulating from the Renaissance and beyond. Warfare, scientific advance, fragmentation of society and pluralization of worldviews produced crises of confidence in God, progress, and even existence, a spiritual crisis that transformed the arts, philosophy, and religious and social life.

Northrop Frye discusses the origins of Romanticism in the breakup of the concord between rational and empirical categories of knowing on one hand, tracing back through Bacon, Newton, and Descartes to classical Greece, and the biblical mythology which has even more deeply informed western life, on the other (English 5-10). Surely Romanticism in this respect represents an initial stage of modernism. From this point of view, postmodern art and poststructural philosophy can be seen as an extension and refinement in focus of the same set of crises, rather than a departure.

This framework will exhibit what is in fact, De Prosopo's observation notwithstanding, a considerable play among the modern readings of Poe, and appreciation for the range of his participation across modern discourse. At the outset, we can affirm that despite this play, and the variety that follows, there is one orienting point of consensus: with the lone exception of Lawrence, modern readings invariably conceptualize Poe himself as a modern or protomodern, and their task as analyzing his modern insight. He is always finally the deconstructor, never the deconstructee.¹

This chapter will examine modernist readings of Pym in two categories of emphasis, with admittedly unstable and overlapping boundaries. After looking briefly at studies that tend to perceive Poe generally as a protomodern literary innovator, influencing twentieth-century modernist poetics, we will concentrate upon those largely ahistorical deconstructionist readings of Pym that analyze the text as a metafiction and a metalanguage which employs self-referential strategies in order to deconstruct representation. Finally, we will examine those studies which, informed by poststructural linguistic

insight, nonetheless look beyond questions of expression and representation to find implication of other philosophical issues, effectively reintroducing intellectual and social history, now from a modern point of view.

2

Protomodern Poe

In 1961 Martin Heidegger summarized his experience of the modern world:

The spiritual decline of the earth is so far advanced that the nations are in danger of losing the last bit of spiritual energy that makes it possible to see the decline... The darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the transformation of men into a mass... have assumed such proportions throughout the earth that such childish categories as pessimism and optimism have long since become absurd. (qtd. in Bradbury 327)

Such a diagnosis is not far from the worldview refracted through the prism of Poe's fiction. Similarly, recent Poe critics have configured his central concerns in ways that might be seen as coincident with Heidegger's preoccupations--with the problem of being and certitude; with the anxiety of death and death itself as phenomena important to our understanding of life; and with the quest for an authentic existence in the face of dehumanizing forces.² Of course Heidegger's quest led him to embrace a movement that proved to be the perfection of dehumanization

and nihility. But the world of the twentieth century was in the making in Poe's day, and Poe's perception was sensitive enough to register the fragmenting and isolating impact which the convergence of social, economic, scientific, and technological forces was already exerting upon the individual. Louis Rubin says much the same thing when he links Poe to traditional Southern agrarian dissent: he uttered "an appalled protest against dehumanization and the stifling of the human spirit in a mechanistic universe," the one antebellum writer able "to perceive the human capacity for evil that was soon to result in the enormous blood-letting of the Civil War" (147-48)--or, as David Hirsch reminds us, of world war, the Gulag, and the Final Solution.

But Poe's focus was relentlessly upon the individual. His accounts of individuals alienated from social or divine authority, and from society itself, call into question concepts of unity, harmony, and faith that had organized Western life for millenia. As we discussed in chapter three, many have found Poe to prefigure Freud in challenging Cartesian, Lockean, and Romantic conceptions of a unitary and rational self. This is the sense in which Allen Tate views Poe, "the transitional figure in modern literature, because he discovered our great subject, the disintegration of the personality" (Carlson Recognition 241).

But the French led the way in the recognition in Poe of a modern sensibility and poetic. His experimentation with the symbol and other devices was so influential upon the French Symbolist movement that they themselves regarded him as a kind of founder.³ Like them, Poe sought a purity of expression beyond the capacity of contemporary conventions, and his work served as a sort of laboratory of techniques for

versification and imagery to create effects that preserve some of the indefiniteness, the synaesthesia, and the musicality, for instance, that can characterize phenomenal experience. Underlying this innovation is the stance in Poe toward the separateness and self-reference of poetry, a fundamental shift that Theodor Adorno places at the "watershed" of modern aesthetics: art after Poe and Baudelaire "seeks to discard illusion without resigning itself to being a thing among things. The harbingers of modernism, Poe and Baudelaire were the first technocrats of art" (qtd. in Harold Bloom "Inescapable" 25). Ambivalent though Eliot was, this is the same basis on which he came to recognize Poe's contribution to modern poetry, in his "advance of self-consciousness" and "extreme awareness" of language. He quotes Baudelaire on this point: Poe established that "the goal of poetry is of the same nature as its principle, and that it should have nothing in view but itself" (Carlson Recognition 215, 219).⁴

Charles Feidelson was the first American to develop the thesis that Poe and other Renaissance writers experimented with language in ways that prefigured modern literature. In Symbolism and American Literature (1953) he advances the argument that these writers constituted a native symbolist movement, one that resembles in certain respects the French movement it predates. Inheritors of the extreme dualism of the American Puritans, they had a heightened consciousness of the gap between the human mind and the world, or, by extension, the word and the thing. Thus, like Jonathan Edwards in his metaphysical writing, and Cotton Mather in his hagiography, Emerson, Poe, and their contemporaries were attracted to the symbol as a possible way out of the impasse, a third alternative to pure subjectivism, and equally

groundless objective representation through severely delimited faculties. But while symbolic theory for Mather and Edwards was inseparable from their theism and revelation, both Renaissance and modern writers' explorations of symbolic expression involved language as autonomous, independent of author and world alike. Meaning is/was seen as generated by and within language:

Once we refuse to contemplate a separate reality 'meant by' the word, meaning becomes an activity that generates a pattern. By turning away from the old dichotomy, the symbolist uncovers a new variety, what [I. A.] Richards calls "the fabric of our meanings, which is the world." (56)

3

Deconstructionist Poe

Clearly, as Feidelson recognized, to confront the crises of the modern experience is increasingly to confront language itself. In 1914 Kafka complained "What I write is different from what I say, what I say is different from what I think, what I think is different from what I ought to think, and so it goes on further into the deepest darkness" (qtd. in Bradbury 328). This observation reflects the letter and the spirit of what Richard Sheppard called the "crisis of language" at the core of the modern problems of faith, epistemology, and being, all enfolded within Kafka's remark. Obstructing or somehow failing to communicate reality, language becomes increasingly the object of scrutiny and reference for the philosopher, the poet, and the critic.

A number of critics of Poe focus upon his deconstruction of the relationship between word and thing, or language and meaning, by exposing, as Kafka does with his image of the abyss, the futility of the quest for an original presence. Pym has seemed to them to be richly ironic and self-referential, folding back upon itself to comment upon its own textuality, raising questions about the very fictive, linguistic, and cognitive structures that constitute it; calling attention to its own complex performance; and questioning its own proffered grounds of authority. At the same time, the reader can never dismiss the possibility that Poe is simply duping his readers, much as his character Von Jung, of "Mystifications," confused his duelling opponent with the Latin book on duelling protocol, rendered nonsensical by the removal of every third word: It is "so ingeniously framed so as to present to the ear all the outward signs of intelligibility, and even of profundity, while in fact not a shadow of meaning exist[s]" (260-61).

We have discussed the most notable of the deconstructionist readings, Lacan's analysis of the sign in "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (1956), and Derrida's analysis of Lacan in his "The Purveyor of Truth" (1965).⁵ Lacan found the significance of the chief sign, the letter to the Queen, lay not in its increasingly irrelevant contents but in the power it lent its possessor, as a sign, as it changed hands in an Oedipal power struggle. Derrida's critique of Lacan served to further destabilize and decenter the sign. Derrida demonstrates that the sign/letter has reference not to the phallus at the center of Lacan's Freudian structure, but to other texts/letters in an endless chain of signification, implied in expanding narrative frames of the story Poe

has provided, as well as the texts of psychoanalysis with which Lacan himself attempts to frame/contain the story. Truth refuses establishment, receding infinitely ahead of us.

Joseph Riddel, in "The Crypt of Edgar Poe" (1972), Michael Williams, in A World of Words (1989), Kenneth Dauber, "The Problem of Poe" (1972) and The Idea of Authorship in America (1990), and several others come to similar conclusions. Riddel, for instance, demonstrates in his analysis of "The Fall of the House of Usher" how the setting of the story is a "world of words," everywhere the "spirit of the sign" (120, 125), instanced in the library, Roderick's paintings and wild songs, the "Mad Triste" story-within-the-story; and even the text's differentiation of narrator/Roderick, Roderick/House, human/world, subject/object. The letter with which Roderick summoned the narrator announces a crisis, but its meaning is indeterminate, ever deferred in textuality. Like the house itself, the narrative splits along the fissure in the house's wall, growing out of the abyssal tomb at the house's center. Fissure and tomb image the abyss between language and truth; the collapse upon an empty center "exposes the fiction of the origin," and reflects the centerless being and existential agony of Roderick.

In the study of Pym, this line of thinking was opened by French critics who first recognized it as a self-referential narrative. Studies by Jean Ricardou (1967), Maurice Mourier (1974), Maurice Lévy (1974), and Claude Richard (1974) resemble each other in offering Pym's journey as an allegory of the narrative's composition, organized around metaphors of script and scripting. Ricardou's "The Singular Character of the Water," the only one translated (for Poe Studies, 1976), is the

most often cited in the American studies. For him, Pym is making a "journey to the bottom of the page" (4), where meaning, constituted in the opposition of black ink on a white ground, gives way to the blankness beyond the bottom margin of the page--reflected in the undifferentiated whiteness around the Pole and the narrative's abrupt cessation. Like all text, Pym ultimately can be "about" nothing other than itself, dramatizing its own insularity.

Working in this paradigm, American critics have found other forms of self-referentiality, elaborating in various ways the observation that the narrative, as John Carlos Rowe puts it, "'progresses' from an ordinary referential discourse to a poetic expression in which the metaphoric structure of language materializes in a landscape of signs" (Custom-House 97). Daniel Wells offers a brief but vivid and influential reading, entitled "Engraved Within the Hills: Further Perspectives on the Ending of Pym" (1977), in which Poe, as artist, and his creations, the artist's inscribed self, conspicuously interpenetrate. In the "Mr. Poe" of the Preface and Note, in the "representation of a human figure" carved into the marl, pointing Pym "to the region of the South," and in the chasm glyphs themselves, which Wells feels spell out Poe's name backwards, a kind of signature on a textualized landscape, the creating self punctures the boundaries of his creation (23A.10). Correspondingly, the narrative concludes by staging the reabsorption of the creatures into the imagination which generated them. The great, shrouded figure is "the apotheosis of the creative imagination itself"; disappearing into the misty chasm, "Pym is absorbed back into his Poe-lar source" (14). Is there a point to this display, beyond highlighting the "artificiality of art"? In his own rather hasty

conclusion, Wells reasons that the final biblical-sounding quote ("I have graven it within the hills, and my vengeance upon the dust...") is a note of authorial reprisal against dull and inappreciative readers "blind to the ingenuity which lies before their eyes, but beyond their vision" (15).

Wells focuses upon images of authorial signature; Stephen Mainville, Paul Rosensweig, Stephen Donadio, and G. R. Thompson all have other candidates for the central trope by which Poe represents writing and its limits. For Donadio, it is a complex architectural symbol presented indirectly: the ruin. A provocative analysis previously unnoticed by Poe and Pym bibliographers, "Emerson, Poe, and the Ruins of Convention" (1986) juxtaposes these authors to show how the violence of each against formal genres grows out of prophetic visions of modernity, and finds "aesthetic principles central to the development of modernist form" (84). For Pym, he recasts the well known problematic features of the narrative in terms of aesthetic intention: the narrative disorder and disruptions, the disconnections and lack of narrative "memory," the juxtaposition of the familiar with the strange, the sudden transformation "before our eyes" of representational mode (i.e. mundane, dreamworld; realistic, irrational), and, most important, the sense of incompleteness. He maintains that in precisely those ways in which Pym, as well as Emerson's essays, are thought to fail in Romantic formal terms, they are modernist masterworks, abstract rather than mimetic. He compares the experience of reading Pym to observing an architectural ruin: the structure superficially appears incomplete, but its deeper effect is that of a structure in a state of decay or demolition. It is fragmentary, anachronistic, disjointed, and for the viewer disorienting.

Of course, as Donadio admits, this symbolism is within the bounds of the Gothic Romantic imagination. But he argues that the tension at the center of Romantic discourse, the "vastness of artistic vision" against the limitations of the achievable--what might be called, to use Frye's term, the "Kantian dilemma" (English 84)--led inevitably to the radical aesthetics and focus upon form that characterize modernism. When an artist attempts to represent transcendent truth as a whole, containing, so to speak, the structure within the language of the text, he or she is bound to fail. Grasping this inherent limitation, Poe and Emerson recognized the greater potential for representation in a fragment. Like a ruin, it can evoke an idea of the whole even as it inherently displays its own inability to present it whole. Whether Poe and Emerson made an epistemological breakthrough, and if so what that might involve, Donadio is studiously evasive, though if he thought they did their essential Romanticism would be reaffirmed. His burden is to prove an aesthetic breakthrough. Far from a failure, Pym is a "triumph of vision," pioneering a new perspective we would later see in Pound's Cantos, and Rodin's sculptures of body fragments, for instance.

Mainville, in "Language and the Void: Gothic Landscapes in the Frontiers of Edgar Allan Poe" (1981), takes as a point of departure the landscape analysis of Pym, including the work of Edwin Fussell, Leslie Fiedler, and Kent Ljungquist, Jr., to offer the frontier as the trope of representation in Pym and the unfinished Journal of Julius Rodman (1846). Yet, probably Ricardou is his closest precursor. Like the margin of a page, the frontier carries a double significance, representing both a border and what is beyond. Like the "unexplored" on an early map, it is a set of "meaningful marks," yet it stands for an

unmarked region, meaningless because unrepresented. But the geographic frontier for Poe is only an image of the interior frontier of human identity, marking "the unknown, the limit of consciousness" (347). Mainville argues that in Poe's fiction, human identity is linked to consciousness, which can exist only in the conditions of signification, that is only within the context of language: "To step out of language--out of human context... is to inhabit the inhuman void, the pretext of humanity" (357).

Corresponding to this image is Pym himself, whose physical penetration of the frontier reflects his own dual significance as a human figure but also, monstrosity, a figure of the void—one of the scouts for Poe's own linguistic expeditions. Pym travels beyond the point to which language and human-ness can follow him, but even before this we sense an otherworldly significance about him. In his refusal, against all argument, to believe that the figures carved in the marl are writing, that they are anything but contextless, meaningless marks of nature (see 23A.10), Pym dismisses the context of signification: "Adverse to using or apprehending any interpreting symbols," Pym's "literalness is in contrast to what makes [him] distinct from others, his ability to use language as symbol" (357). Mainville identifies provocative questions in Pym and Rodman about the definition of humanity and the cogito, but, like some of the other Deconstructors of this section, he has a tendency to avoid pursuing them, choosing at opportune moments to move laterally to identify additional figures of textuality or the void. Nonetheless, Ketterer's dismissal of his essay as "muddled" is unaccountable ("Tracing" 255).

Rosensweig focusses upon the recurring "false ending" as a trope of

epistemological uncertainty, with particular reference to the final one, the pseudo-biblical quote in which rock is apparently ground into dust, a metaphor for the disintegration of meaning.⁶ Rosensweig uses Pym to try to grind to dust previous interpretive paradigms, all of which misinterpret the ending as either a muddled contrivance, an "allegory" of a deep psychological or spiritual meaning, or a meaningful self-reflexive message encrypted in the linguistic materials. He identifies two conflicting trajectories in the novel, the powerful thrust toward an end, in the senses of completion of the journey, of literary form, and of telos. "Mr. Poe" is as obsessed with getting the journey in print, as the Note editor is in trying to force a meaning upon Pym's data, as Pym is of reaching the Pole, along the way stocking the reader's expectations with the promise of "the most intensely exciting secret which has ever engrossed [the world's] attention" (17.12).

Against this is the text's refusal to yield a true ending, offering only fantasy endings that do not end (his disappearance into the polar chasm), that do not appear (the final "two or three chapters" lost with Pym; the silent Peters and Mr. Poe), and that fail to provide meaning and closure (Pym's actual accidental death, the editor's hollow analysis; the bogus biblical text). In the process, "the very concept of endings and meanings" is undermined; the deific final voice is not only false but "garbled and unclear," and the search for authentic meaning is doomed to frustration (142, 149).

As interest grows in Poe's last major work, Eureka (1848), his rather arcane cosmogony, critics are increasingly making comparisons with Pym. Both texts are concerned with ultimate questions, with

origins, and with ends; both transcend the genres they participate in, and utilize language and literary conventions in innovative and unique ways; and both variously draw attention to their own design and language—an irresistible attitude for poststructuralists. Allen Tate first suggested that Poe's work should be read in light of Eureka and his other "theological" writings (by which he means the so-called angelic dialogues), and Charles O'Donnel discusses it at length in his 1962 Pym essay. More recently, John Irwin (1980) and John Carlos Rowe (Custom-House [1984]) interlard their Pym analyses with substantial comment on Eureka, while John Limon (1990) and Cynthia Miecznikowski (1990) offer full-scale intertextual readings.⁷ Miecznikowski's "End(ing)s and Mean(ing)s in Pym and Eureka" is somewhat unique, in that she reads each book against the other, and both against Poe's theory of poetry. She sees Pym and Eureka not, as others have, as simple complements, the former dramatically prefiguring the metaphysical exposition of the latter. More subtly, Eureka is a "kind of apologia" for Pym, an explanation of the epistemological problem which language in quest of truth runs up against—and which, in Pym, brings language to a halt.

Others have argued that these works violate Poe's first axiom that truth is beyond the bounds and aim of poetry.⁸ Miecznikowski is the first to argue that these overtly truth-driven quests rather grow out of and illuminate this principle. Eureka is a "Book of Truths," highly indebted to contemporary science, as Limon demonstrates, but in it Poe ridicules rational and empirical methods, and presents it rhetorically as "speculative inquiry, based on unverifiable intuition" (Miecznikowski 57). Its Preface places it in the realm of poetry and beauty, the "locus of the soul," involving for

Poe not intellectual insight but aesthetic effect, offering at best an "indefinite... briefest glimpse" of divine truth (56). Where Pym's verbal imagery ends in the abyss and silence, Eureka is verbose but fails to disclose full meaning, able only to suggest the inconceivable (infinity, nothingness, absolute unity) in conceivable ways: partially, negatively. She cites Joan Dayan, who points out that the multiplication of synonyms, dashes, and other tentative signs compounds reading difficulty and indicates negatively that truth lay beyond the reach of language. For both books, "words fail to deliver the writer to his end (or the reader to the ending)" (59).

One of the more influential poststructural studies of American literature, Rowe's Through the Custom-House, yields a reading of Pym that has itself been frequently cited in Poe studies. It stands above many of the others for its gracefulness and clarity--not always common in this discourse--which seem to arise out of a genuine desire to illuminate both French theory and American literature, rather than merely to sound Derridean. His stated aim is to combine an intertextual approach and a focus upon marginalized, problematic texts to free new insights from a literature long dominated by the "oppressive mythologies" that have have compelled us to look at texts in the same few ways. Certainly a healthy attitude to take toward Pym, it has enabled him, as he claims, to exploit rather than repress, the irregularities that distinguish the text, and allow the wider play of signification it demands. Like the others in this chapter, he considers the inconsistencies and disjunctions not to be flaws, but part of a completed design. Epitomizing his own essay, he offers an insuperable summary of the narrative's principle mechanism:

Forever holding out the promise of a buried signified, Pym offers a sequence of forged or imitation truths: delivered messages, deciphered hieroglyphs, a penultimate vision. And yet, the inability of each successive sign to present its truth is ironically disclosed, increasingly entangling any reading in the signifying web it attempts to unravel. (93)

Rowe's focus then is the textuality instanced within and throughout the text, which renders ordinary representation problematic at every turn by doubling and trebling displacement (in fact, as he says, rendering it infinite). In this Barthian funhouse, Poe has anticipated the Saussurean conception of meaning as constituted within language, and Derrida's différance, by which meaning or presence is at once constituted in the 'differential' play of signifiers, as Saussure postulated, and 'deferred,' an absence indicated by the presence of a sign, and perpetuated by the endless displacement of signs, for as long as one cares to try to represent reality. It is the simultaneous presence and absence indicated by the sign that constitutes what Rowe calls the "doubleness of writing," enacting both desire and repression. On one hand, "for Poe, language has the power to destroy the facticity of human experience and present that 'other world' for which human beings instinctively yearn," a "simulacrum of lost presence" (106, 97); on the other, it is destined to defer and frustrate that desire it has created. As a virtual signifier machine, Pym intensifies this experience for the reader, and in so doing, it "enacts the deconstruction of representation as the illusion of truth" (95).

Like Rowe, John T. Irwin in American Hieroglyphics is concerned

with the fundamental doubleness of writing, and anticipated most of Rowe's general conclusions. However, Irwin's willingness to utilize other texts, not only from contemporary theory but from moments prior to and contemporaneous with Poe himself distinguishes his work from Rowe's, who does not deliver on his own promise to do so.⁹ Thus, while Rowe's briefer treatment is more eloquent, Irwin's analysis acquires a depth and authenticity enabled by the reconstruction of the environment within which Pym was born. Moreover, as a genuinely cross-disciplinary approach, it more accurately represents some of the complexity of society itself, and permits Irwin to unfold philosophical and social implications in Pym which, while not outside language, are not confined to reiterating the illusion of representation.

4

Philosophical Poe: Reconstituting the Context

This is the case with each of the studies that remain to be discussed. Like the previous studies, they are enlightened by poststructural insights and recognize more or less the linguistic determination of philosophical and social concepts. They come to many of the same conclusions as those discussed above, but also to additional ones, correcting an ahistorical bias. As Russell Reising put it, "For many contemporary theorists, the question of American literature's social or historical significance is not so much engaged and transcended as it is ignored" (200). Eugenio Donato succinctly articulates the problem:

If the linguistic reference of words is words, if texts refer to nothing but other texts, then... there is nothing to interpret, for each sign is in itself not the thing that offers itself to interpretation but interpretation of other signs. (37)

One can move in either of several directions from this point of departure. One choice has been to repeatedly locate in texts the message in the conditional clause of Donato's analysis. For some, Joseph Riddel, Michael Williams, and Dennis Pahl for instance, the staging of the abyss is itself the distinguishing feature of American literature.

Others have been unwilling to simply reiterate the hermeneutic loop. They follow up in genuine intertextual readings the traces--the protensions and retentions that Derrida considers the temporal equivalent of différance, recreating segments of an intellectual or social horizon. Indeed, this is Derrida's own procedure, in his comments on "The Purloined Letter" ("Purveyor"). As Frank Lentricchia has demonstrated, Derrida's own methodology resembles less that of American deconstruction than it does Foucault's "archeology" of discursive fields or, we might add, Bakhtin's analysis of the infusion of conventional literary structures of the heteroglossia that characterizes society in any given moment (After ch. 5)

To elaborate a few examples in American studies of this latter direction, Evan Carton, for example, reads Poe and other Renaissance writers through Hegel, identifying dialectic strategies by which they sought to assert and sustain contradictory impulses toward, on one hand,

grounding in a transcendent presence, through identification with nature or humanity, and on the other toward individuality and originality. This defines the tense ambivalence of the relationship of the doubles in "William Wilson," for instance. The narrator resists union, but cleavage and unity are "performatively" sustained against each other, Carton reasons, by Poe's hand.

Stanley Cavell, in "Being Odd, Getting Even" (1985), reads Emerson and Poe through Descartes, arguing that both interrogate and ultimately affirm the cogito argument, the assertion that thought certifies existence. In his quest for a theoretical ground for self-authority, Emerson raised the bar, emphasizing the provisionality already implicit in Descartes: I exist only so long as I think, sinking into conformity and nonexistence the moment I cease to "claim it, stake it, enact it" (109).

Poe, in his analysis of perversity, advances a negative proof. Cavell calls Poe's stories "philosophical essays turned fiction," and he sees Poe's narrators' perversity as part of a feverish "longing for assurance" (138). While Descartes held that free will entailed moral responsibility, the narrators' confessions token a lack of responsibility, preserving the cogito. "For Poe we are responsible metaphysically for our errors exactly because we are not morally responsible for them. I am the one who cannot refrain" (142). Thus, as Descartes assumes a skeptical stance--inductive logic--as part of a procedure that leads to affirmation, Poe parodies skepticism in his own desperate affirmation.

Joan Dayan, on the other hand, in her richly intertextual reading Fables of the Mind, finds Poe to be fundamentally skeptical. Drawing on a line of influence first suggested by Joel Porte, she argues that the

most important pretexts for Poe's metaphysics and epistemology are Lockean empiricism and Edwardsean Calvinism, a genealogy he both received and revised.¹⁰ As a janus-faced figure, looking back to eighteenth century rationalism and ahead to modernism, Poe's career was a "massive attack" on nineteenth-century intellectual structures and society itself.

Returning to Irwin, we can see that, unlike Rowe, whose ahistorical focus upon doubleness blurs the distinction between Poe and twentieth century modernists, Irwin argues that the Renaissance writers' probing of language was inseparable from the Romantic quest for origins. Language was regarded as double in the sense that it both stands for a thing and for the absence of the thing itself. They felt sure that if they could reach back to a point prior to this duality, the organic unity between word and thing could be reestablished. Nineteenth-century obsessions with two geographic questions grew out of this quest: the search for the source of the Nile, and the quest for the South Pole, both of which converge in Pym. Today it is probably hard for us to imagine the mystery with which people contemplated these goals, involving, as they did for many, expectations of supernatural or ultimate discoveries. But we begin to appreciate this as a result of Irwin's remarkable reconstructions and analyses of nineteenth-century scientific, poetic, and journalistic discourses, incorporating in addition to the Nile and the South Pole, other lines of inquiry, such as the cosmology of Humboldt and Kepler, the natural science of David Brewster and others, and the anthropological, linguistic, and biblical-historical theory of John Stephens, Jacob Bryant, Charles Anthon, and others, all of whom were concerned with origins, all of whom

interested Poe, and all of whom bear some relevance to Pym.

Irwin, of course, pays particular attention to the figure of the hieroglyph, interesting to the other Renaissance writers, but used by Poe as the organizing symbol in a number of works. In Pym, it is the single image by which he associates the search for the Pole with the search for the source of the Nile, entailing geographic, cultural, and linguistic origins. Called to attention by Champollion's deciphering of the Rosetta in 1821, Poe and certain other writers saw it as a form of writing more primitive and potent than phonetic writing. Irwin summarizes the significance and the promise it held for them:

Underlying Whitman's sense that "in the best poems re-appears the body" [from "A Song of the Rolling Earth"], is the image of writing as hieroglyphic doubling, the image of the work of art as the writer's inscribed other self. And certainly part of the immense symbolic importance of the Egyptian hieroglyphs for the... Renaissance is that they represent the archetypal form of writing in which the outline of a body is rendered visibly present. Wherever the question of certainty arises... the hieroglyphs are never far away, for [they].... achieve[d] the visible presence, the self-evidence, of pictographic signs. (98)

Clearly, the interest in linguistic origin implied more than language; they believed it intersected with the origin of humanity itself. In this myth, of which Narcissus is the pretext, the human self originated with the most primitive 'linguistic' act of all, a "nameless creature" recognizing and naming its own image, 'inscribed' as a shadow or a reflection. This "alogical" moment, in which a supposedly

yet-nonexistent self recognizes itself as doubled, requires a recognition of the image simultaneously as different from and the same as itself, as split and doubled. The hieroglyph as a metaphor bears what language cannot contain, this prelinguistic point of origin. Moreover, indescribable though it may be, the hieroglyph **promises** presence and origin. Hieroglyphs and analogues are everywhere in Pym, and the trajectory is ever away from arbitrary and toward hieroglyphic language.

Irwin's attention is directed toward the interplay of doubles, which is thrown into ever greater relief as Pym's universe is reduced into basic binary relations (and beyond, in the polar abyss, symbol of immediate, undifferentiated being.) Irwin shows how Poe isolates moments of alogicality and indeterminacy at the core of identity, focussing particularly upon instances of writing as a "written self," a doubling of the self who writes: Poe-Pym, which Pym reverses by inscribing "Mr. Poe" in his own narration (initiating, of course, an infinite exchange of authorship, for "Mr. Poe" has himself inscribed an explicitly fictional Pym in his own fictionalized version for the Messenger, etc.) Not only is writing destabilized by the confusion of narrative authority, but the subject is as well. Selfhood in this equation is not a simple sum of body/shadow, but arises reflexively out of the "mutually-constituted opposition."

This is the frame in which Irwin interprets the climax as a skeptical pronouncement. Pym's merging with the great white shrouded figure, which he imbues with divine status--a divine hieroglyph--seems the ultimate Romantic gesture. However, Pym is looking at his own vast, light shadow. Poe, Irwin suggests, presents one of the polar meteorological phenomena he knew from David Brewster's Natural Magic

(1831) to highlight Pym's metaphysical blindness: "By interpreting the misty figure with its aura of divinity as Pym's unrecognized shadow, the reader recognizes that 'God' has always been a self-projected, idea-lized image of man," or, as he puts it elsewhere, the intellect tries to "survive death by projecting an image of itself (the self as image) into the infinite void of the abyss" (226, 205).

Dennis Pahl, in a chapter on Pym, "Poe/Script: The Death of the Author in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," in his Architects of the Abyss (1987), examines the constitution of the subject in the textuality that surrounds it, but virtually all of its insight derives from Rowe and, especially, Irwin. He does offer an interesting configuration of the Pym/"Mr. Poe" double as a William Wilson-like struggle for mastery and presence. As written selves, both are an absence. "Mr. Poe" asserts authorship of Pym's narrative by supplying the germinal idea, by serving as editor, and by actually fictionalizing part of it under his own name. At the same time, Pym, in producing his own narrative (including "Mr. Poe"), attempts to acquire self-authority, reflected in his struggles to understand and master the world he travels through. But Pym as narrator is finally unable to isolate a self outside the textuality instanced within every episode—fictionalized by "Mr. Poe," departing from "Edgarton," represented in a variety of notes he and others write, and ultimately constituted in his own narrative.

In a recent article, "The Arabesque Design of Arthur Gordon Pym," revising a 1989 essay, G. R. Thompson builds upon his 1973 book Poe's Fiction, which defined a significant German counterstrain within the landscape of Romanticism. The principle mechanism of "Romantic irony," as he quotes Raymond Immerwahr, "the drastic violation of illusion by

reference within a literary work to its author and the process of its creation, to the transgression of the boundary which separates our level of reality as readers... from the reality of the characters" (192). He used this concept to help define Poe's ambivalent status within Anglo-American Romanticism, for which he was, as Eliot and Edward Davidson had argued, a "crisis," in Davidson's term (ix). Thompson's recent article further refines this counterstrain, focussing on its dominant form, the arabesque, which Friedrich Schlegel discussed in the later eighteenth century. He also establishes its linkage to poststructural theory. In the process he delivers an interpretation of Pym that far exceeds the utterly baffled 1973 reading.

Arabic pictorial art richly utilized the frame in ways that evoked the divine; according to Schlegel, writers were adapting these uses to their narratives, in ways, Thompson argues, that prefigure postmodern fiction, in metaliterary reference to the infinite. Like the carpetmakers, the writer of the "Arabesque Romance" might make the frame penetrate the framed design, or have it in some way point to infinite reality beyond itself, or make a natural framed image dissolve into the abstract frame. For example, as Pym sails beyond the end of his own narrative, the note that follows constitutes an artificial frame (the rational world of publishing and philology) which accents its own artifice and points to the void it is inadequate to frame. In a number of ways, an "Arabesque Romance" like Pym foregrounds the frame in ways that menace conceptual boundaries, for instance between natural form and abstract design, and between the framed finite and the unframeable infinite.

The basic Arabesque structure is the quincunx, a five-pointed parallelogram (four corner points framing a centerpoint) which can be conceived either as a square or diamond shape, or a double or mirrored "V." In The Garden of Cyrus, or the Quincunciall, Lozenge, or Net-work Plantations of the Ancients, Artificially, Naturally, Mystically Considered (1658), Sir Thomas Browne, whose work was well-known to Poe, discusses the universal recurrence and symbology of this infinitely multipliable pattern. Thompson finds the quincuncial form everywhere in Pym, but limits his analysis to the most concrete example, the bird rookery of Kerguelen's Island which so fascinates Pym with its inter-species cooperation and the network of alternating penguin and albatross nests. Thompson notes that in his lengthy description and commentary, Pym twice describes the quincuncial nest arrangement itself (14.13, 14.16), first as an albatross nest surrounded by four penguin nests, and secondly, as a penguin nest surrounded by four albatross'. The symbology of the quincunx is complex, as Browne and Thompson describe it, but Poe's use of emphasizes its figuration of reversibility, paradox, and indeterminacy, for in the world of the rookery, despite its precision and order, there is no stable reference point; the center is everywhere and nowhere.

In his 1987 Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing, Gerald Kennedy reconstructs the "ideology and ideography of death" in the nineteenth century, to show how American culture sought to contain, mitigate, sentimentalize, and, in the theology of salvation, deny death. Poe's writing, Kennedy argues, can be seen as a life-long assault upon this mythology, for he experienced death as unmitigated life-shaping traumata in the deaths of his mother, at age two, his foster mother, Frances

Allen, when he was twenty, his wife, whose fatal illness dominated his life for five years before she succumbed at twenty-four, and early prescience of his own premature death. Kennedy conceives of Pym as a strategic collision of language, specifically the inscribed ideology of death, and death itself, as immediate phenomenon and as primal anxiety. Language "seeks to emulate death to deny it," but Pym's progressive "confrontations with the body of death" prove it to be inarticulable (171, 146). For the reader, if not for the obtuse Pym himself, Pym's immersion takes the form of a series of "metaphors of illegibility": Augustus' note to Pym in the hold of the Grampus that his life is in jeopardy (due to the mutiny); Pym's disguise as Rogers' corpse to shock the mutineers in an effort to reclaim the ship; and the incident involving the deathship, for instance. Each involves an attempt to read either an actual text or to "read" or rationalize a situation involving death; each attempt proves deceptive, resulting in the inarticulate silence of the horror of death for Pym, and of the multiplied actual deaths of others.

The cannibal scene is of particular interest for its sacred import. Kennedy sees it as a parody of the sacrificial king, organized in Christian and "pagan" ritual. As René Girard points out in Violence and the Sacred, the king may be scapegoated as a way of organizing and venting aggression. But as Kennedy argues, the cannibalization of Parker involves physical appetite, not spiritual/communal redemption; moreover it does not channel violence away; it merely perpetuates the chain of violence that had begun with the mutiny. By the time Pym reaches the cliffside, his verbal and ritual strategies for containing death have been so undermined that the only relief he can find from the

anxiety is death itself (so he lets himself fall.) In the final scene, he disappears into the vortex, a prelude to physical death; but the white figure is, for Kennedy, the narrative itself, "rising before him to deliver him from silence. He is about to be gathered into the artifice of the text, to become an enduring subject caught in language like a fly in amber" (172-173). Exchanging his physical life for an inscribed life--falling into writing--enables the assurance of at least a symbolic survival: "he loses his fear by gazing upon the 'perfect whiteness' of the textual space in which the life of writing unfolds" (173).

In a subsequent brief article, "Pym Pourri: Decomposing the Textual Body" (1992), using the same critical paradigm, Kennedy would concentrate upon scenes of putrefaction as a particularly forceful imaging of utter annihilation. He contends that thematically the decomposing human flesh functions as a trope of erasure, "effected by the narrative itself in its relentless decomposing of the myths and pieties of nineteenth-century culture," including calling into question rational epistemology and the belief in a benevolent God (Kopley Poe's 174).

In a structuralist reading, Herbert F. Smith applies to Pym the decoding model Roland Barthes used to read Balzac's "Sarrasine" in S/Z. Barthes traced the reader's cyclic movement through progressively more sophisticated decoding strategies, as the text defeats his or her expectations. Of the Barthes' five codes, Smith brings three to bear upon Pym. When simple tracking of the plot and the names is disrupted by a puzzle, or an impossible event, the reader moves down a level, deferring expectations and suspending disbelief waiting for a solution.

But puzzles can accumulate to the point of overwhelming this strategy, as they do in Pym, resulting in a breakdown of etiology. The further application of logic by the reader only leads to greater confusion--as it does for Pym himself, who is unable to read beyond the simplest code. The sophisticated reader is forced to the next level, recognizing that a different logic, a different "cultural code" is being employed. Faith and reason are progressively displaced as the modus operandi of the narrative by an alternative code Poe introduces: that of an extant matrix of ideas comprising an organicist geophysics at odds with the dominant Aristotelian/Newtonian model of the universe. Pym's world increasingly comes to resemble the organic worlds of John Cleve Symmes and Richard Watson.

The former espoused a radical cosmology and geography that included a landscape and human culture within a hollow earth, accessible through marine portals at the poles. It was described in James McBride's exposition The Symmes Theory of Concentric Spheres (1826) and the novel, probably by Symmes, Symzonia, A Voyage of Discovery (1820). Watson described in his essay "On the Subjects of Chemistry" and elsewhere a model of the earth as a great living organism, the animation within and upon it as by sexual laws over those of mechanical physics.¹¹ The text operates analogically and metonymically by the same principles: the waters and rocks on Tsalal seem to have organic properties; and the Tsalalians believe the ship is a living creature, which in Pym's organic world is correct. Smith cites Marie Bonaparte for her Freudian reading of the Grampus' hold and other sites of Pym's inhumation as wombs, nurturing, threatening, and finally 'birthing' him. His analysis culminates in the characterization of Pym's journey as a procreative act

producing the text itself. The reader is

forced to merge the creation of Pym with the larger creation of the (Symmesian and Watsonian) earth... as the creative maleness of Pym merges with mother Earth to close the cycle of the text. Like the solitary spermatozoon uniting with the egg after its long night swim, Pym rushes into the self-immolating embrace of the shrouded figure. (92)

Smith argues that Pym, closer to postmodern fiction of "Borges, Barth, and Nabokov" than Balzac's "Sarrasine" in the complexity of its encoding, carries the sophisticated reader to a reading level which will appreciate the book "for what it is, a metafictional classic" (92). His analysis does not support such a claim, however, though the Pym that emerges is a richly dialogic novel for the historical traces adduced. The transcendental signified is, by Smith's reading, displaced by Poe from Newtonian physics to a radical organic theory, which remains intact in the most sophisticated code Smith adduces. This would identify Poe not so much as a proto-postmodernist, or any kind of modernist, but a Romantic. Smith himself merely displaces signified presence from Watson/Symmes to the reader, who remains outside Smith's structure, uncritically assumed to be a unified, predictable consciousness, and to read in an orderly and uniform way.

In "'Postmodern' or Post-Auschwitz: The Case of Poe" (1992), David Hirsch also looks at Poe's work as an analysis of death, and his assessment of Poe's work as the "disassembling of the Judeo-Christian construct of the human form... of fusion of flesh and spirit" is not far from Kennedy's thesis. But his use of Poe refers to a later historical moment, imputing to him something very close to virtual

prophetic status in relation to the twentieth century and the genealogy of postmodern fiction. He prefers the term "Post-Auschwitz" not only as more determinant, but for its focus on what to him is the most important referent to the post-World War II "existential despair," a world "of total war, mass murder, and genocide; an age of the death of God and eclipse of Western culture and Judeo-Christian values" (142). Poe's voice is of special resonance for Hirsch, for prior to Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, "his imagination somehow gained access to a vision of the disintegration of the human form that was enacted in the death camps and the Gulag" (142). Allen Tate anticipated Hirsch in this discovery, as we discussed in chapter three, a debt that Hirsch acknowledges, wishing only to refine our focus by the particular juxtaposition of Pym and Auschwitz for the light it sheds on a post-war sensibility about death and "the derangement of human relations" (145).

His comments on Pym are not extensive, but what emerges from his explication of some of the death scenes, from the gratuitousness of the violence, and the nonchalance of Pym's report, is not the horror that Kennedy finds, but a sense of the casualness of death. It is, he argues, the "banality of evil" that Poe opposes to the "grandeur of evil" of Blake and Shelley. The latter looks back to Milton's Satan; the former ahead to Auschwitz and the Gulag.

Despite previous expressions of disgust, Pym's description of the cannibal act emphasizes orderliness in a matter-of-fact tone that belies the claim of a profound impact:

Let it suffice to say that, having in some measure appeased the raging thirst which consumed us by the blood of the victim, and having by common consent taken off the hands,

feet, and head, throwing them, together with the entrails, into the sea, we devoured the rest of the body piecemeal, during the four ever memorable days of the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth of the month. (12.9)

(The following sentence, as Hirsch points out, relates mundane information about rain and a contrivance to catch it.) Hirsch compares this with an Auschwitz "physician," who recounts the details of a gassing and the menu of his subsequent meal in the same diary entry.

But this effect is not particular to criminals; Hirsch's point is that it is characteristic of the age, weakening the distinctions between criminal, victim, bystander alike. A recent television documentary brilliantly illustrated for me--unwittingly--what Hirsch is driving at. It excerpted the diary of a Jew in the Warsaw Ghetto before the roundup:

"Death ceases to impress. We see people killed on the streets and we continue our business. People stop inquiring at the hospitals about their relatives" (qtd. in Warsaw).

In a thin, confused essay, "Prologue to a Dark Journey: The 'Opening' to Poe's Pym" (1972), William Peden attempts a reading of Pym as a "proto-type of 20th century Existential non-hero," moving through an absurd and illusory world (84). Peden's method is to focus upon images which metaphorically define Pym as helpless, and his situation as absurd, such as the sailors' view from the Penguin of Pym, pinned to its hull by a spike through the back of his neck: "the body of a man was seen to be affixed... beating violently... with every movement of the hull" (1.8). However, Peden's key sentences are rendered in vague, romantic language that doesn't take us far: Pym "is a dark voyage from which there is no return, an existentialist trip from nothingness to

nothingness" (89).

A richer existential-psychological interpretation is the Poe chapter of Jerome Loving's recent Lost in the Custom-House (1993), which reads Poe's psyche and biography into Pym, "The Imp of the Perverse," and "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," finding both subjective psychological projection and objective metaphysical implications. Pym is a "literary drunk," a mimesis of an intensifying series of alcoholic reveries and nightmares, telling a story that does not end but "stops," as the authorial persona finally falls into unconsciousness. Loving notes the pattern in Poe's own life of promising but false starts: his pseudonyms, his removals to various cities, his series of desperate engagements following Virginia's death--Poe's version of "the American dream of beginning anew" (63).

He finds a similar pattern in Pym's progression from one boat to another. As Poe's own plans were ruined, often by uncontrolled drinking, Pym's projects are wrecked, along with his boats, in circumstances that involve alcohol-influenced behavior and mental states. In each cycle, motive as a priori design gives way to uncontrolled "movement without motive" (57). Like the speech of a drunk man; language itself gradually loses its capacity for deductive order, or to communicate "any meaning in our conduct other than the fact of the conduct itself" (57). Pym is one of Poe's effectively cataleptic or posthumous narrators resurrected to record the disintegration of their orderly lives into nightmare, unconsciousness, and finally death. In the process, a metaphysical reversal is effected: the apparatus of a priori, putative truth so painstakingly constructed in Pym's preface, for instance, is deconstructed as a fiction, while the fantastic

delirium to which the narrative devolves is shown to be the true account: phenomenally, in the context of dream and alcohol, and metaphysically in the context of the disintegrating order of life itself.

Notes

¹ See chs. 3 and 5 for discussion of Lawrence on Poe.

²For example, Stanley Cavell and Joan Dayan, Fables, on the first point, Gerald Kennedy, Poe, on the second, and John T. Irwin, Hieroglyphics and Evan Carton on the third.

³Principally, Charles Baudelaire, Stephen Mallarmé, Paul Valéry, and Arthur Rimbaud, in addition to Baudelaire. Eliot's "From Poe to Valéry" remains the best analysis, but for a more comprehensive treatment see Patrick Quinn's The French Face of Poe.

⁴See ch. two for further discussion of Eliot.

⁵See ch. three.

⁶"'I have graven it within the hills, and my vengeance upon the dust within the rock'" (Note.9).

⁷Tate is discussed in chapters 3 and 4; O'Donnell in chapter 4; Limon in chapter 5; and Rowe, Irwin, and Miecznikowski below.

⁸See especially "The Poetic Principle," but also "Philosophy of Composition" and "Letter to B—," all reprinted in Essays and Reviews.

⁹Rowe's neglect of context would take another form in his later attempt to rehistoricize Poe, resulting in anachronistically applying twentieth-century attitudes about race as a basis for resurrecting the moral indictment of Poe. See chapter five for discussion of Rowe's later work and this issue.

¹⁰See ch. 5 above for further discussion.

¹¹Smith is the first to identify this essay as a source. He documents Poe's familiarity with Watson's work in "Usher's Madness and Poe's Organicism: A Source," American Literature 39 (1967): 379-89.

Afterword

Stanley Fish warns that we should be wary of the assumption of steady advance in enlightenment, that a later reading "sees" more clearly than an earlier, suggesting the need for a paradigm that recognizes the variety of political and social forces that determine change in critical "fashion."¹ With that qualification in mind, we can note ideas about the text that have accrued to provide later studies with tools at least to penetrate more deeply. The contemporary reviews display a confusion of expectations about Poe's intent, revealed in general dissensus and in confusion within individual reviews about whether they were being gulled or entertained. The late nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries resisted both Poe and Pym on heretical grounds, as in it he violates both the moral thematic and formal aesthetic criteria of the genteel tradition. The biographical-psychoanalytic Poe scholarship the early New Critics inherited sustained a mainstream view that his work was contaminated everywhere by authorial presence; Pym was of no interest to them.

Psychological criticism did, however, contribute the enduring recognition of the dynamics of the unconscious, opening up symbolic study and multiple levels of signification. When New Critics, always interested in irony, began to look more at narrative literature, some began to notice Pym's sophisticated and ironic formal constitution, and to unlock some of Poe's conscious innovations in narrative

technique--though with nothing like consensus. With the emergence of theories of subversiveness in American literature, some involved in the enterprise of American literary historiography found an avenue for Pym's entry into that discourse. The tangential activity of locating American writers in a Western intellectual context began to develop the mystical and spiritual dimensions which linked Pym to international Romanticism.

The recognition of Poe's significance for modern literature and modern ideas, in the nineteen-seventies, advanced Poe to the head of the canon, and Pym to priority in Poe's writing. Its self-referentiality, in the form of metaphors of scripting that effectively textualize the landscape, interrogate the nature of representation. At the same time, its confused claims of authorship and grounds of authority among the multiple narrators places selfhood in a relative position to language. Modern readings of Poe recognize that legibility, the very condition for reading the text, exists as a core theme within it, with basic epistemological implications.

Because of the accumulated sense of richness in the ways it draws from and feeds back literary, social, and intellectual currents of its environment, Pym has yielded interesting source and influence studies and historical readings from the -fifties on. As a result of the recent resurgence in interest in the historical context, reflected in 'New Historicism,' a number of sociological and historical readings have emerged in the past ten years, and constitute the most definite trend for the future. Specifically--since we have grouped them nowhere else--readings by David S. Reynolds, Dana Nelson, G. R. Thompson (1992), Donald Pease, William C. Spengemann, Gerald Kennedy (1987), John T. Irwin (1980; 1992), and John Limon all more or less share

Saussurean-Derridean recognition of the linguistic constitution of the subject. But unlike a certain reductive line of overlapping deconstructionist readings, all also benefit from the post-Althusserian and Foucauldian insights that the ideological formation of a text cannot be understood apart from its social context.

In the aggregate this range has provided unusual depth and dimension, exposing the many 'faces' of Pym, analyzing form at all levels, and configuring its structure in intriguing, radically different ways. What emerges is a composite portrait of the heteroglot character of the text. It is especially "novelistic" in Bakhtin's sense, reflecting the conflicting voices of society, before the voice of cultural authority has rendered them into a unified, official account. A hundred years of source scholarship and formal analysis has revealed the Narrative to be an astonishing tapestry of factual and fictive pretexts representing genres and discourses from across the range of society. Intellectual analysis has found Poe to be interrogating aesthetic, epistemological, and theological issues of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and to be anticipating modern concepts of identity and language.

The arrangement of the Pym literature in chronological and practical categories, as represented in this summary, runs the risk of either imputing or imposing by its own structure a greater coherence on the body of commentary than is actually there. But the possible benefits outweigh the risk: first, whatever coherence and patterns do exist could not otherwise be exposed; and second, even with arbitrary boundaries in my own structuring, it should be a more useful document for future Poe studies.

Closer analysis of the literature reveals dissensus, divergence, and extremity--a body of criticism that has answered Poe's heteroglot text with its own heteroglossia. This condition is reflected in Poe's Pym (1992), a collection of essays representing the full range of approaches and aims, each rarely referencing the others. And this diversity is representative of every period. It has seemed many things to many people, with widely varied psychological, historical, formal, metaliterary, and philosophic readings. Not only have these swung according to fashion diachronically, but have coexisted synchronously. Even within individual categories, especially the historical and psychoanalytic, readings have grown too far apart for much dialogue. Thus there are distinct genealogical lines of criticism, with, until recently, little reference to previous scholarship outside a particular line.

Both the variation in the commentary and the characteristics of individual studies suggest that readers have consistently revealed uncertainty about how to cope with the play Poe indulges in with every component of the narrative form. With its aberrations, machinations, lapses into tastelessness, and mixed signals about intended form, readers have found it to be peculiarly indeterminate in meaning, and their expectations become confused. We have examined a number of highly-regarded books on Poe, such as G. R. Thompson's, David Ketterer's, and Daniel Hoffman's, that hit a wall when and if they deal with Pym, unable to make their thesis fit, and offering instead plot summaries interlarded with hollow comments. We have seen switches in approach in midstream, and even conversions to a directly opposing stance (as in Julian Symons). A number of studies simply conflate

extant readings; others hedge their interpretation in language as evasive and mystical as Pym himself uses, or argue that thematic interpretation itself is simply a wrongheaded approach for Pym, as do Sydney Moss, Burton Pollin, and Judith Sutherland.

A number of readers have noticed that Pym has a tendency to undercut the very structures it invites, entrapping the critic within the text's expanding frame (Sutherland, Robert Lee). John Carlos Rowe best summarizes the mechanism of Pym's evasion of mastery.

Forever holding out the promise of a buried signified, Pym offers a sequence of forged or imitation truths: delivered messages, deciphered hieroglyphs, a penultimate vision. And yet, the inability of each successive sign to present its truth is ironically disclosed, increasingly entangling any reading in the signifying web it attempts to unravel.

(Custom-House 93)

Richard Kopley, for instance, accepts the Note author's invitation to solve the puzzles of Pym's narrative with scholarship. He replaces the latter's studiously unhelpful "conjectures" with self-generating linguistic minutiae (over eighty footnotes in one article), and constructs a massive counterplot that collapses of its own weight. John Barth methodically probes Pym with several mythic and other structuring principles, only to finally dismiss the action as "meaningless, dramaturgically," and the book itself, as lacking a "mainspring" (17). Like others, he proceeds as Roland Barthes predicts, in S/Z, calling up progressively more sophisticated decoding strategies as each fails.

But there is a mechanism of irony by which Pym evades mastery that

has yet to be isolated. The most sophisticated decoding strategy available to a reader leaves in place uncontained elements that have ironic significance. Triggered by a formal (or informal) definition, the text doubles into a parody of the form identified, remaining beyond the conceptual frame. It is an adventure story, a mythic journey, a dreamtext manifesting Poe's unconscious, a textualized landscape conflating word and thing, and it is a parody of each of these. As Judith Sutherland put it, trying to shake down the text, "worrying it" like a bone, can cost the critic her "dignity" in the eyes of her colleagues.

At the same time, even to identify it as an ironic form--a textualized landscape, or an imaging of the abyss--is to structure it in such a way as to exclude questions that from within the text demand consideration. In focussing upon its ironic form, positive formations escape the ironists' conceptual framework in any terms other than negation. But it won't do to simply jettison the undeniable substance in, for instance, Bonaparte's psychoanalysis, Porte's account of a guilt-driven soul futilely seeking grace, Spengemann's traveller striving for total, Emersonian self-authoring. Whatever Pym "says" about these projects, it consists of more than to assert their linguistic determination or humanity's epistemological delimitation.

The problem is not that every essay on Pym is reduced before the writer's own eyes to a worthless parody of criticism. Far more often, a reading that attempts mastery leaves the inescapable impression that only a fragment of the text's meaning has been grasped, and that Poe, with the core meaning, remains in an ironic stance outside the structure.

Even a broadly intertextual work like Irwin's American Hieroglyphics, drawing in the discursive formations of natural science, philology, mythology, history, exploration, and metaphysics out of which Pym was formed, fails in their overly-narrow application to to the single, if profound, Romantic postulation that language and human consciousness originated with the same gesture. It does not account for equally profound discoveries by others. The findings of Bonaparte, for instance, in tracing Pym's quest for the maternal, are equally profound, and one cannot reach the bottom of this line of signification--from "Tekeli-li" cry of the polar birds being the title of the play of his mother's final performance, to the endlessly multiplied symbols of internal human anatomy on Tsalal, and external beyond it, to ever more subtle layers of symbolism. Similarly, St. Armand's identification of metaphoric alchemical processes in a "drama" of ego formation brilliantly accounts for the transmutations and grotesquerie in the text, anomalies no other structure has come close to explaining. Again, Dana Nelson's excavation of a critique of colonialism played out from beginning to end also convincingly accounts for much of Pym's material.

This suggests not a failure on Irwin's part to read his precedents, but a hermeneutic failure which he shares more or less with Pym critics of every period. Irwin's reading is indeed profound and irresistible, possibly the best to date, but inclusive as it is, it could hardly accommodate Bonaparte's, St. Armand's, or Nelson's findings, without being stretched so widely as to dilute his own original insight. Those readings that have attempted to conflate the range of sexual, historical, and philosophical import are coercive and hopelessly tangled (Eric Mottram, Daniel Hoffman). Perhaps it could be done in a book

rather than an article format.

But what is needed is a hermeneutic with looser rules of exclusion to accommodate an enormous range of play. To formulate this is not the task of this study, but perhaps it can help. Poe studies is overdue in providing a reading that can place the range of formal and thematic significance already established, within a single paradigm. The best readings deconstruct earlier structural readings like Bonaparte's, only to then ignore them. But so long as this is continued, we will replicate her chief fault, that of narrow partiality.

Note

¹See "Transmuting the Lump."

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