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"Pym" and the Popular: Form and Structure of the Novel

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Pym and the Popular:
Form and Structure in the Novel

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

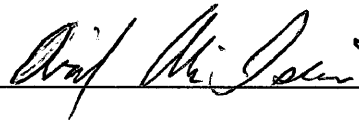
by
Arif Ali Isani

1995

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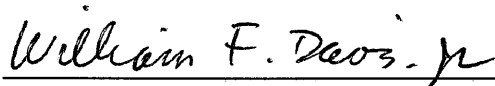
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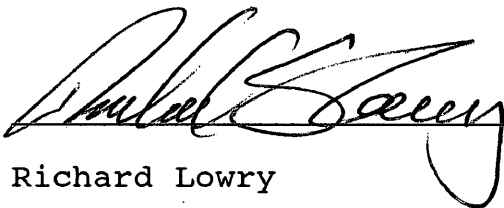


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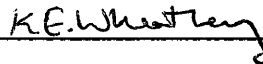
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ABSTRACT

Though modern scholars generally ignore the literal reading of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, Poe's tale was written as a novel of adventure and was almost universally judged as such by contemporaneous reviewers. Moved by financial need and encouraged by the Harpers and others, Poe attempted to write a "popular" novel. With contemporary tastes and contemporary interest and enthusiasms in mind, he wrote an episodic and sensationalistic tale. Both Poe as author and the Harpers as publishers capitalized on the current interest in polar exploration. Pym is a timely work. The launching of the United States Exploring Expedition of 1838 covers the span of the writing of the novel and polar exploration forms a backdrop for the tale. Poe borrowed extensively from popular works and emulated popular genres. He was persuaded by the marketplace. While there is an air of sincerity in the novel, there is also an element of disdain. Poe emulates the popular but he also includes an element of subversion, the underlying level of irony.

Pym and the Popular:
Form and Structure in the Novel

Since its scholarly rediscovery in the early 1950's, Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym has been studied from the perspective of a variety of literary theories, but, as David Ketterer points out, the readers of Poe's time probably read the work as a novel of adventure (236). It was aimed at pleasing the ordinary public and gaining some monetary reward for the author. This episodic and action-oriented novel can be profitably examined against the background of popular taste and noteworthy events likely to be in the minds of Poe's contemporaries. The literal level of reading, largely ignored by critics, has significance because it is probably in accordance with the author's expectation of the bulk of his readers--an expectation which helped mold a considerable part of his book. Ketterer identifies the literal reading as one of twelve distinct readings, calling it "a strange adventure story in the imaginary voyage tradition," and J.R. Hammond alludes to it when he describes Pym as "an exciting tale of adventure in the vein of Marryat or Fenimore Cooper" (125). Most contemporaneous reviews recognize Pym as a novel of adventure and the praise it receives is usually for its defining element, though this praise is also accompanied by demurrals because, in the eyes of most reviewers, the tale either borders dangerously on the "marvellous" or indulges unabashedly in it. Burton Pollin's opinion that "Poe was trying . . . to cater to the current popular taste for sea

stories involving discoveries of strange lands, shipwrecks and narrow escapes, and violent action" (Edgar Allan Poe 38) is a logical one. Interest in sea adventures, travel literature, and accounts of exploration was a major motivational force. The novel's form and structure can be studied against the background of the contemporaneous milieu and the needs of a romance emphasizing adventure. Current interests and the popular milieu in general influenced the form and structure of Pym.

Contemporaneous reviews discovered by Pollin and Vann are leading to a new perspective on the reception of the novel. Criticism was mixed, for the novel was seen as including the plausible as well as an excess of the "marvellous." Pym was viewed as a tale of adventure and both the praise and the condemnation were based on the novel's adherence or lack of adherence to the ideals of the novel of adventure. It is "a strange tale of adventure and peril," notes the New York Star (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 10). Pym's "adventures are rare and wonderful," declares the Family Magazine (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 46). The New Yorker of Horace Greeley declares it "a work of extraordinary, freezing interest beyond anything we ever read. It is more marvelous than the wildest fiction, yet it is presented and supported as sober truth" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 43). The reviews in the British press betray a similar taste and likewise a fairly similar recognition.

The anger sometimes exhibited by reviewers, supposedly in reaction to a hoaxing that underlies the claim of an autobiographical account by Pym, is actually a comment on Poe's lapses in vraisemblance resulting in apparent ridicule of the reader. The novel, says the London Monthly Review, is "an out and out romance" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 49). The Torch, alluding to the latitude expected by the writer of romance, suggests some defense of Poe when it refers to "our unbelieving age" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 52), while the Era declares the story "highly exciting" though "too uniformly extravagant" (Vann 43).¹

Reviewers point to Daniel Defoe and Frederick Marryat in broad comparison, but there is no shortage of modern studies unearthing definite and probable sources for Pym. The latter lead surely to contemporary vogues and naturally bring up the issue of the extent to which elements of the popular influenced the form and structure of the novel. Sea tales were doing well, with James Fenimore Cooper and Marryat among the publishing authors. Juvenile tales were popular enough for the Harpers to keep building their Boy's and Girl's Library, started in 1831. Its volumes included Johann Wyss's The Swiss Family Robinson, written for his children, and Barbara Hofland's The Young Crusoe; or, The Adventures of a Shipwrecked Family on a Desolate Island (Exman 21,33). Exploration literature such as Benjamin Morrell's Narrative of Four Voyages and John Stephens's

Incidents of Travel were attractive sources and examples of popular writing. Poe, with his need for money (Ostrom 2) and his desire for success, was neither an indifferent nor an inadequate judge of the popular.

The first installment of the novel appeared in The Southern Literary Messenger in January of 1837, but one can expect the final version of the tale to reflect Poe's awareness of events ranging from the current to those dating several years earlier. There were debates, controversies, and current enthusiasms which could be counted upon to kindle interest within the writer as well as to influence the market for his book. The interest in the South Seas, in Poe's day, culminating in the establishment of the United States Exploring Expedition in 1836, is a notable factor connected with the writing and publication of Pym. Pym was probably written mainly by the summer of 1837 when, as Ridgely suggests, the economic downturn persuaded Harpers and Poe to slow the novel's progress towards completion ("Growth" 35). However, the entire period until the setting of type in the summer of 1838 should be open to inquiry. Harpers submitted the completed book at the New York copyright office in August 1838, the month of the sailing of the South Seas expedition. To varying degrees Poe absorbed the contemporaneous evidence of the popular and molded Pym accordingly. Some of the turns the plot takes are striking evidence of the persuasive power of current vogues on a

young man searching for a foothold on the literary scene.

But also important is the fact that Poe did not want to write a novel; the marketplace essentially forced him into the genre. Terence Whalen argues that the tales of Poe, who stated that "the horrid laws of political economy cannot be evaded even by the inspired," "were expressly summoned by the emerging literary market" (385). While he could recognize the popular, and economic realities did not escape him, Poe was not happy with the power of the marketplace and its impact on the author. He would have liked fame on his own terms, but the fame that he saw had not gained fame thus. Pointing to Lydia Sigourney a little later, he would disdainfully characterize her fame as one acquired by "merely . . . keeping continually in the eye, . . . by appealing continually with little things to the ear of the great, overgrown, and majestic gender, the critical and bibliographical rabble" (qtd. in Douglas 83). While he caters to the marketplace, Poe expresses his disdain for the reader. He includes an element of subversion, an underlying level of irony and ridicule. He appears to please the reader by indulging in the genres in vogue, but he also exaggerates and parodies those same genres. This results in a double voice in his fiction. G.R. Thompson suggests that Poe includes both deception and discovery in his works: In Pym, "as always, Poe calculates his effects so as to deceive the reader at first and then to insinuate that he has been

duped regarding the reality of events, and, in fact, regarding the true action of the story" (177). In American Romanticism and the Marketplace, Michael Gilmore notes that American writers of the period 1820 to 1860, undergoing the experience of "professionalization," had to adapt to the demands of writing for the public and "dependency on the market inspired them with a . . . mixture of accommodation and resistance" (11-12). He goes on to assert that disappointment connected with thwarted authorial ambitions "impelled the romantics toward textual strategies of difficulty and concealment, causing them to reconstruct in their relations to their audience the alienation they criticized in modern society" (13). David S. Reynolds, in Beneath the American Renaissance, writes: "Nowhere is the dual process of enthusiastic absorption and studied redirection of the sensationalism so visible as in Poe's writings. In the criticism on Poe, it has not been shown that his writings were, to a large degree, rhetorical responses to popular sensationalism" (226). The sensationalism that he satirized in "How to Write a Blackwood Article" is dramatically present in his own "Berenice." But, as he explained to Thomas White, "To be appreciated you must be read, and these things are invariably sought after with avidity" (qtd. in Reynolds 226). Simultaneous emulation and subversion can be seen in Pym. Exaggeration and analysis have been recognized as

Poe's tools for the latter (Reynolds 527-529).

Since the tale is fragmented, the method behind the structure must be studied not only to discover the degree of unity but also to illuminate the stages of writing to trace the events of the time which could have influenced the writer. L. Moffitt Cecil's "Two separate short narratives" (232) theory does not adequately account for the several segments of the tale. Cecil argues that the first narrative ends with the Grampus episode and the second starts with the rescue by the Jane Guy and goes through the end of the novel. Ridgely and Haverstick propose five stages of composition. Four of these match the segmental breakdown of the novel, but the fifth, covering the period March through May of 1838 and accounting for the initial chapter 23 and the "Note," is proposed as "a very late addition" (78).² The initial chapter 23, introducing the mysterious geography of the chasms of Tsalal, and the final "Note," which simultaneously interprets the hieroglyphics formed by the shape of the chasms and closes the tale with the death of Pym, provide both an explanation and a closure for the novel. Since, in function, the fifth stage merges with the fourth, it is reasonable to give Poe credit for a purposeful mixing to heighten the climax. Actually, with serial publication long in mind, Poe wrote an episodic tale, its four basic segments each intended as an endeavor into a popular form of writing. Poe's focus on the audience

broadens as he progresses. With each installment, he grows increasingly inclusive, gaining another audience without dropping the last. The narrative progresses from a juvenile tale in the Ariel segment through the Defoesque mutiny and shipwreck segment of the Grampus, followed by the polar voyage adventure of the Jane Guy, and eventually the romance of Tsalal which itself has an admixture of a variety of elements of current interest. Considering the ambitious span, the interlinking, though loose, is acceptable from a critical point of view.

While Poe was not writing a juvenile tale in its entirety, he was willing to slant at least the early segments toward a juvenile audience. Pym is an adventure tale adhering to the principles of what Poe described, in "How to Write a Blackwood Article," as "sensation" writing (341). The bulk of the juvenile literature of the day was for a younger audience and the nature of juvenile fiction was still largely didactic, intended to improve rather than to entertain. However, the content of Poe's tale hints that he recognized the promise of the market.

Juvenile fiction was a significant part of the total fiction of Poe's day. At a time of change, it too was evolving, though the most notable change, the bulk of the move from open didacticism and moralizing toward bolder adventure and entertainment was yet to come in the 1850's and the post-bellum years. Poe was a harbinger of the

future. Fiction was becoming increasingly popular in the marketplace and, in the absence of separate figures for the sale of juvenile fiction, one can reasonably assume that the emergence of the latter followed a similar pattern. According to MacLeod, the production of juvenile literature, which was "only a trickle in the 1820's had become a steady stream by the 1830's and a positive torrent by the 1850's" (20-21). By 1856, Samuel Goodrich, himself a popular writer of children's literature, could write of "teeming shelves" in "juvenile bookstore[s]" and assert that "nineteen twentieths of these works have come into existence within the last thirty years" (174). Goodrich started publishing his Peter Parley books in 1827. Lydia Maria Child started the popular Juvenile Miscellany in 1826 and published it until its demise in 1834. Did its success and then its absence suggest an opportunity to Poe? The demand is evident in the flourishing of other juvenile magazines of the time. Nathaniel Willis started Youth's Companion in 1827. Caroline Gilman founded and edited The Rosebud Magazine for children. Eliza Follen edited the Sunday School publication, The Child's Friend. Catherine Maria Sedgwick and Lydia Sigourney were popular writers who contributed to this genre. And from its founding in 1824 until its demise in 1860, The American Sunday School Union did much to promote fiction for juveniles through Sunday School works; fiction was a significant portion of its

printed output, which by 1830 had risen to six million copies (MacLeod, Moral Tale 22). This was the milieu in which Poe wrote Pym, incorporating elements reaching out to younger readers while addressing an inclusive audience.

Burton Pollin makes a persuasive suggestion that Poe aimed for a "double audience," intending "to banter the mature and gull the juvenile reader" (Edgar Allan Poe 8). Ridgely evidently concurs (31). The popularity of maritime adventure fiction, especially of Marryat and Cooper, was probably influential in turning Poe to adventure. Hofland's republication of her Young Robinson Crusoe by Harpers may indeed have provided "a general inspiration and a few specific elements" (Pollin 6). But Pym is a juvenile tale only in part. It is notable for its inclusive style and aim. The further we go in the novel, the more the juvenile element decreases. The American juvenile novel had not yet been born; the Southern Literary Messenger had no history of welcoming longer juvenile works; and Poe, while continuing the early juvenile approach of his tale for a while, understandably altered his focus to incorporate maturer themes and methods.

The two installments of Pym in the Southern Literary Messenger are arguably juvenile in part, suggesting that Poe was seeking new grounds. It is unlikely that he had an elaborate tale in mind. Nor does he appear to have written initially much more than what the journal published. The

later inclusion of this segment, after minimal revision, suggests a realization that, while keeping the juvenile, he should address a more inclusive audience. Critics have repeatedly pointed out that Pym and Augustus were mere boys of twelve and fourteen in the Southern Literary Messenger segment. Even after the revision for the novel version, they were only fourteen and sixteen years of age. That Poe made this change is evidence of the broadening focus, but the fact that he did not go beyond the still youthful age is also significant. The bantering tone of the narrative and the lack of emphasis on verisimilitude in the Southern Literary Messenger segment points to the initially limited importance of the tale for Poe as well as to the dual audience theory of Pollin and Ridgely.

The Ariel episode and the stowaway experience of Pym in the hold of the Grampus are basically juvenile in their unrealistic emphasis on wild adventure, hair's-breadth escape, overly clever contrivance of plot, and stilted dialogue. Pollin gives a detailed listing of the juvenile when he asserts that the insertion of the largely unrevised Southern Literary Messenger text into the novel assures the persistence of the juvenile orientation, including "the stress upon 'fun and frolic' . . . ; the boyish dialogue of Pym and Augustus . . . ; the sententious references to schoolboy 'deception' . . . and hypocrisy . . . ; the crude humor of the vaudeville trick played upon old Grandfather

Peterson . . . ; and the pietistic references to God . . . " (Edgar Allan Poe 7). The two boys were "in the habit of going on some of the maddest freaks in the world" (Poe, Pym 57). Some of the description of their daring is far from suggesting maturity. Thus, we are told Augustus

suddenly started up, and swore with a terrible oath that he would not go to sleep for any Arthur Pym in Christendom, when there was so glorious a breeze from the southwest . . . he was only tired, he added, of lying in bed on such a fine night like a dog, and was determined to get up and dress, and go out on a frolic with the boat. I can hardly tell what possessed me, but the words were no sooner out of his mouth than I felt a thrill of the greatest excitement and pleasure, and thought his mad idea one of the most delightful and most reasonable things in the world . . . I sprang out of bed . . . and told him that I was quite as brave as himself, and quite as tired as he was of lying in bed like a dog, and quite as ready for any fun or frolic as any Augustus Barnard in Nantucket. (58)

The Ariel episode is a boyish adventure, with its two teenagers, one drunk and the other terrified, heading out to sea after sunset in a "slightly put together" sailboat. After being run down by the Penguin, miraculous survival in the crash, and rescue in the darkness, the young adventurers return undiscovered to Captain Barnard's house in time for breakfast. Nothing unusual was noticed by the elders, for "schoolboys . . . can accomplish wonders in the way of deception . . ." (64). The neat encapsulating of the adventure in terms of time evidently did not bother Poe.

The deception of Grandfather Peterson is notable not only for the crude simplicity of its trickery but also for the language of its simplistic humor:

"Why, bless my soul, Gordon," said he, after a long pause, "why, why--whose dirty cloak is that you have on?" "Sir!" I replied, assuming, as well as I could, in the exigency of the moment, an air of offended surprise, and talking in the gruffest of all imaginable tones--"sir! you are a sum'mat mistaken--my name, in the first place, bee'nt nothing at all like Goddin, and I'd want you for to know better, you blackguard, than to call my new obercoat a darty one!" For my life I could hardly refrain from screaming with laughter . . . He stopped short . . . in his career, as if struck with a sudden recollection; and presently, turning round, hobbled off down the street, shaking all the while with rage, and muttering between his teeth, "Won't do--new glasses--thought it was Gordon--d_____d good-for-nothing salt water Long Tom." (67)

Poe expends no effort to make the impersonation convincing. This episode is a burlesque for young and less sophisticated readers. The trickery and immature teasing amounts to a somewhat perverse "fun and frolic."

Running away from home and sailing to distant lands in search of adventure was not a new theme in juvenile fiction, though in the moralistic vogue of the time authors often manipulated plot and dialogue to make it a warning to overly bold and errant youth. Thus the author of one story, Harry Winter, The Shipwrecked Sailor Boy (1832) said he would count himself adequately rewarded "if but one lad by reading this brief story, shall be stopt short of his sea-faring notions, and became settled down to his studies, of business; and attentive and dutiful to his parents" (qtd. in MacLeod 85). Poe has a less sententious and more entertainment-oriented approach to fiction. Marryat and Cooper, who have been reasonably proposed as sources by critics, seemed more acceptable guides. Poe's eye was on

adventure, not opportunities for moralizing. Early in the novel comes the report of Augustus's love of recounting "stories of the natives of the Island of Tinian, and other places he had visited in his travels" (57) and Pym's almost perverse, if adventurous, attraction to even the harshness of the life of a seaman. The latter admits:

My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. Such visions or desires--for they amounted to desires--are common, I have since been assured, to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men . . . (65)

As a successful writer of maritime adventure, Cooper may have provided more than the name for the Ariel through his sea-novel The Pilot. It was a best-seller in America, selling over 100,000 copies (Mott, 305). Marryat's success also did not escape Poe. Even before the novel had gone beyond the Southern Literary Messenger phase, Thomas White, the proprietor of the Messenger, saw fit to link Poe to Marryat in style (Pollin, Edgar Allan Poe 6). But on its publication, only one reviewer seems to have been reminded of Marryat, the London Spectator. Both Peter Simple (1833) and Mr. Midshipman Easy (1836) were popular books in America (Mott 318), going through several editions by 1838 and enjoying extraordinary popularity throughout the century. The former has been linked to a specific borrowing (Pollin, Edgar Allan Poe 21). Poe shows no admiration for Marryat in his review for Joseph Rushbrook; or, The Poacher in 1841,

but he admits that Marryat "has always been a very popular writer in the most rigorous sense of the word" (Essays 325).

Ironically, Poe's own foray into the realm of the adventure novel leads one to question the "probabilities" of his plot no less than his questioning those of Marryat's plot. As a stowaway, Pym follows many other youthful fictional adventurers before him, but the fact that he survives the several accidents in the hold strains believability. While Poe has heavily packed this part of the novel with action, the plot goes nowhere, and he can be found guilty of the failing he will place at Marryat's door four years later when reviewing Joseph Rushbrook (Essays 327-28). Pym's nightmare existence for eleven days in the hold, his sleeplessness alternating with excess sleep, his consciousness alternating with unconsciousness, his hunger and dire thirst--all this while Pym is without adequate count of time and entombed in the darkness of the "labyrinths of the hold"--is part of the machinery of horror, but it is also a means to denote the passage of time to transport the reader to another setting. From stupor to terror to reality is a sequence of horror that serves Poe well, and this horror has several facets, as evident in the following statement by Pym:

My dreams were of the most terrific description. Every species of calamity and horror befell me. Among other miseries, I was smothered to death between huge pillows, by demons of the most ghastly and ferocious aspect. Immense serpents held me in their embrace, and looked earnestly in my face with their fearfully

shining eyes . . . The scene changed; and I stood, naked and alone, amid the burning sand-plains of Zahara. At my feet lay crouched a fierce lion of the tropics. Suddenly his wild eyes opened and fell upon me. With a convulsive bound he sprang to his feet, and laid bare his horrible teeth. In another instant there burst from his red throat a roar like the thunder of the firmament, and I fell impetuously to the earth. Stifling in a paroxysm of terror, I at last found myself partially awake. My dream, then, was not all a dream. Now, at least, I was in possession of my senses. The paws of some huge and real monster were pressing heavily upon my bosom--his hot breath was in my ear--and his white ghastly fangs were gleaming upon me through the gloom. (72)

Pym is recalling changing hallucinations that merge with the reality of the leap of a beast. His inflamed mind carries sensation to the limit. The instances of imminent death, and descent into stupor, sleep or unconsciousness, give validity to the claim that, in the interest of popularity, Poe, despite his satirizing of the Blackwood's sensationalism, is using its popular formula of bringing the protagonist to the edge of the ultimate experience. (Weiner, 49-50; Eakin, 1-22).³ This below-decks segment of the plot is strained and "clever." Poe seems to have assumed an undemanding audience for Pym's hair's-breadth escapes and clever solutions. The horrible beast of Pym's semi-dream turns out to be his Newfoundland dog, Tiger, who falls upon him in an ecstasy of love. Augustus's warning, written in his own blood, is found tied to Tiger's neck but torn in a frenzy and lost in the dark until Pym hits upon the idea of sending Tiger to smell out and fetch the torn pieces scattered in the darkness. Then comes the problem of

reading without a light and the solution: Pym rubs the pieces of phosphorus on the paper until a faint glow reveals the words. Finally, comes the attack of the poison-maddened dog, his fortuitous entanglement in the blanket, and Pym's escape behind a handy door. The sleep that follows lasts three days and three nights. Poe is emulating the sensational tale, but with his double voice he is also subverting it, using exaggeration as his method. The episode of the attack of Tiger is a good example. After his nightmarish dreams of jungles and deserts, Pym continues:

I felt that my powers of body and mind were fast leaving me--in a word, that I was perishing, and perishing of sheer fright. My brain swam--I grew deadly sick--my vision failed--even the glaring eyeballs above me grew dim. Making a last strong effort, I at length breathed a faint ejaculation to God, and resigned myself to die. The sound of my voice seemed to arouse all the latent fury of the animal. He precipitated himself at full length upon my body. (72-73)

The description is typical of the brink-of-death sensation tale. Then Poe reduces the moment to the level of the ridiculous:

. . . but what was my astonishment, when, with a long and low whine, he commenced licking my face and hands with the greatest eagerness, and with the most extravagant demonstrations of affection and joy! I was bewildered, utterly lost in amazement--but I could not forget the peculiar whine of my Newfoundland dog Tiger . . . and, throwing myself on the neck of my faithful follower and friend, relieved the long oppression of my bosom in a flood of the most passionate tears. (73)

The ending of the Southern Literary Messenger section in the midst of a mutiny (ch.4, para. 3), as opposed to the seamless continuation of the tale in the book at that point,

suggests that Poe had either written the rest of the chapter during his Messenger tenure, or at least continued the tale shortly thereafter. Either White decided not to publish the next segment, or possibly for monetary reasons Poe refused to submit the remaining material to bring the tale to a logical pause (Pollin, Edgar Allan Poe 38). In any case, the segment's ending is inconclusive.

While the publication was interrupted, Poe appears to have come to a conclusion to salvage the published material, continue the appeal to youthful taste, and broaden the appeal to include older readers. The episodes that follow as a part of what Ridgely describes as the second stage of the novel, or the "voyage narrative chapters," show his inclusive aim, just as the biographical details of his life in 1837 show that he was faced with the reality that economics and the popular taste determine the nature and timing of publication. Whatever doubts he may have had about the significance of popularity, he had acknowledged its power when he solicited contributions for the Messenger from such literati as Robert M. Bird, James Fenimore Cooper, Fitz-Greene Halleck and J.P. Kennedy. Writing to Kennedy, he asked for "any thing [sic] . . . with your name" and boasted of the literary cooperation of the "highest sources--Mrs. Sigourney, Miss Sedgwick, Paulding, Flint, Halleck, Cooper, Judge Hopkinson, Dew, Governor Cass--J.Q. Adams, and many others" (Letters 96). In March of 1836, he had already

been told by Harper and Brothers that they would prefer a book-length narrative to the republication of his short stories. "Readers in this country," they wrote, "have a decided and strong preference for works (especially fiction) in which a single and connected story occupies the whole volume . . . It is all important to an author that his first work should be popular" (Quinn 251). After the shock of dismissal from the Messenger at the end of 1836, came Poe's move to New York. If Harpers gave him further advice it probably focused again on saleability. In May, Knickerbocker Magazine announced that Pym was "nearly ready for publication" (Thomas 244), and on the tenth of June, the novel was copyrighted (Thomas 245). The bulk of the novel was probably finished by this time, but the Panic of 1837 which delayed the publication of Pym until July 1838 could not have helped but serve as a reminder to Poe, as it did to the Harpers, of the practical forces that determine marketability. As Lewis Simpson reminds us, Poe lived intimately in the America "where literature was product and commodity" (147). He had now thrown a wider net than in his Messenger days. His focus was on what Harpers called "the multitude" (Quinn 251). The promise of the lengthy subtitle is highly significant. Pym was a tale

Comprising the details of a mutiny and atrocious butchery on board the American brig Grampus, on the 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 subtitle may have been in Poe's mind even earlier than June 1837, serving as an outline to the writer.

Contemporary reviewers often saw the long, sensational title as truly descriptive of the novel. Some reviewers let the title even serve as a substitute for commentary (Pollin, "Pym's Narrative" 9). Certainly the emphasis of the second segment of the novel (through ch. 13) is more heavily on adventure, and the episodes are strung together to collect a vast variety of sea-experiences under one set of covers.

In the 1830's there was an upsurge in the publication of mariners' chronicles, and this appears to have attracted Poe's attention.⁴ The strength of the market for the chronicles is evident in the appearance of several editions. Poe's most obvious source, The Mariner's Chronicle, Being a Collection of the most Interesting Narratives of Shipwrecks, Fires, Famines, and other Calamities Incident to a Life of Maritime Enterprise, went past its Philadelphia editions to a New Haven edition of 1834. The year 1834 also saw the publication of The Mariner's Chronicles (New Haven), The Mariner's Library (Boston), and The Mariner's Chronicle of Shipwrecks, Fires, and other Disasters at Sea (2 vols, Boston). In the year of the commencement of the Messenger

publication of Pym appeared R. Thomas's Interesting and Authentic Narratives of the Most Remarkable Shipwrecks, and his Authentic Account of the most Remarkable Events: Containing the Lives of the Most Noted Pirates and Piracies (New York).

The parallel interest in fictional "logs" is also worth noting, since a case has been occasionally made for their use by Poe. Poe's early interest in Blackwood's is, of course, common knowledge. Michael Scott's Tom Cringle's Log ran in Blackwood's in August 1833, and his Cruise of the "Midge" followed from March 1834 through June 1835. According to the National Union Catalog, each appeared in at least five American editions or variants by 1837.

Poe's emphasis on adventure and his aim at a double audience, juvenile and adult, is particularly evident in the second segment of the novel, but he was increasingly leaning toward the adult reader. To Poe, Robinson Crusoe was a meeting-ground for both kinds of readers, and a type of tale that focuses on an accumulation of adventure and dispenses with the emphasis on plot.

Poe associated Robinson Crusoe with boyhood and more. Reviewing the illustrated Harper edition of Robinson Crusoe, he wrote with some nostalgia, "How fondly do we recur, in memory, to those enchanted days of our boyhood when we first learned to grow serious over Robinson Crusoe!--when we first found the spirit of wild adventure enkindling within us, as

by the dim fire light, we labored out, line by line, the marvellous import of those pages . . . Alas! the days of desolate islands are no more!" (Essays 201). Poe was typical of many. Thus, the New York American Monthly, reviewing the book in January 1836, emphasizes the joy it brought to juveniles who took the fiction as fact and allowed it to spur their imagination (108). For the even younger set, on several occasions that year, Parley's Magazine presented excerpts and illustration (125, 141) and joined the Juvenile Miscellany in publishing a song, "Poor Old Robinson Crusoe" (Parleys 58, Juvenile Miscellany 212).

— The second segment of Pym launches into somewhat more sophisticated presentation of adventure than the first. The author's aim at a double audience becomes more evident through the action rather than the banter of dialogue and the stilted tone of the narrative. There is greater attention to detail. The fact that there is little emphasis on plot is no detriment in the eyes of Poe. He was well aware of the episodic nature of Pym. A few years later, in 1841, he would refer to Robinson Crusoe as a novel proving that plot "is not an essential in story-telling at all" (Essays 151). In 1843, reviewing Cooper's Wyandotte; or the Huttet Knoll, he would present Robinson Crusoe as an example of one of "the finest narratives in the world" but written without emphasis on plot. "Thus the absence of plot," he would write, "can never be critically regarded as a defect;

although its judicious use, in all cases aiding and in no case injuring other effects, must be regarded as of a very high order of merit" (Essays 482-83). Likewise, in 1846, in "The Philosophy of Composition," he would describe Robinson Crusoe as a type of work "demanding no unity" (Essays 15).

The episodic nature of the tale, especially this segment, did not arouse much contemporaneous comment, except for the generally good-natured remarks pointing out the abundance of thrills. In the matter of narrative tone and verisimilitude Poe receives both praise and criticism--generally with Defoe as the measuring stick. Knickerbocker notices the "Robinson Crusoe-ish simplicity to the narrative" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 41), Waddie's Select Circulating Library comments that "the air of truth is much like old Robinson, and the interest is very deep" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 43), and the New York Review asserts that the novel has an "air of reality which constitutes the charm of Robinson Crusoe and Sir Edward Seaward's Narrative" (Pollin, Poe's Narrative" 44). To the Court Gazette, Pym has a style which is "not an indifferent imitation of that adopted by De Foe in his best novel, 'Robinson Crusoe'" (Vann 43). On the other hand, like the Monthly Review, the magazine notes little emphasis on philosophy and morals though there is a Defoe-like attention to the element of "surprises" as in "that popular work" Robinson Crusoe (Vann 43). Pym is nearly always judged as a contribution to

popular fiction and excess of the "marvelous" and "fabulous" is pinpointed as its failing. "Here and in hundreds of other places," complains the Naval and Military Gazette at one point, "we have not only the improbable but the impossible. It was not thus that De Foe wrote his Robinson Crusoe" (Vann 43).

If the criticism can reasonably be seen as one measure of contemporaneous taste, the critical emphasis on the episodes of action is evidence of the book's reception as a novel of adventure. In this segment's seventy-eight pages (in the first edition), Poe includes mutiny, the quelling of the mutiny, storm and shipwreck, survival without provisions, resort to cannibalism, and finally rescue.

The narrative attains its fastest pace in this segment. To enhance believability, the sequence of time and the sense of the passage of time is maintained by the inclusion of dates as well as by references to the number of days since the beginning of Pym's ordeal in the hold. To maintain the pace, the journal entries condense the time, omitting details of uneventful days. The incomplete sentences of some entries also serve to that end.

Poe does not hesitate to use the bloody and the sensational. The killing of the eight mutineers is recounted in detail. After the non-fatal bludgeoning of Parker, Wilson was "shot . . . through the breast," Hicks died under the paws of Tiger, "the blood issuing in a stream

from a deep wound in the throat," Peters "beat the brains out of Greely," and then falling on Hicks "strangled him instantaneously." Even more sensational is the description of the meeting with the Dutch ship of the dead, its thirty corpses spread out upon the floor, its welcoming representative standing, teeth grinning devoid of surrounding flesh, and his body seemingly nodding and gesticulating but in fact actuated by a seagull feasting on his organs:

. . . there sat a huge seagull [on the Dutchman's back] busily gorging itself with the horrible flesh, its bill and talons deep buried, and its white plumage spattered all over with blood. As the brig moved further round so as to bring us close in view, the bird, with much apparent difficulty, drew out its crimsoned head, and, after eying us for a moment as if stupified, arose lazily from the body upon which it had been feasting, and, flying directly above our deck, hovered there a while with a portion of clotted and liver-like substance in its beak. The horrid morsel dropped at length with a sullen splash immediately at the feet of Parker. (125)

It is representative of the sensationalism of the tale that, involuntarily, the famished Pym moves forward, ready to eat the flesh. After this, even the cannibalism episode which follows does not induce equal horror. Poe admitted his excesses in "Berenice," but he did not renounce his method. In his letter to White, defending his publication of "Berenice," he admitted his use of "the fearful colored into the horrible" and unabashedly asserted his knowledge of the marketplace (Letters I:58).

Pym may not have been the commercial success desired by

the Harpers (Thomas 260, Exman 113), but on balance it was not considered a failure by reviewers who allowed for the fact that it was written for popular consumption. Reviewers such as those of Waddie's, New York Review, New-Yorker, and the Family Magazine, already mentioned, accepted it in that light and commended it for its "air of reality," but of course there were also many whose criticism ranged from the charge of "faulty construction" leveled by William Burton of Gentleman's Magazine (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 39) and the reviewer of the Naval and Military Gazette (Vann 43) to the New York Review's cry of "too many atrocities, too many strange horrors" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 44). The bulk of the objections were to Poe's lack of vraisemblance. "Vraisemblance of his narrative has not been preserved," complained the New York Mirror (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 41). The tale is "full of incredibles" declared The Saturday Courier (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 42). A calmer appraisal addressing the matter of "probabilities" is that of the British Atlas: "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 vraisemblance because our faith is shaken by the impossible" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 51).

If Poe overstepped the bounds of probability, it was partly in search of the popular and partly in ridicule of the popular. On one level, Poe derides the reader's taste

and acumen. Ironically, he uses the genre as format and by exaggerating its features ridicules both genre and reader. Reviewing Robinson Crusoe, just months earlier, he had recognized the necessity of "the potent magic of verisimilitude" (Essays 202) and, in 1834, he had complimented Cooper for his "Robinson-Crusoe-like detail" in the management of his theme (Essays 479). But in Pym, he often sacrificed verisimilitude, attaching thrill to thrill, emphasizing numbers rather than believability. As William Charvat reminds us, "Poe thought all his life of the mass audience as 'rabble'" (93).

While the Tsalal segment has its share of condemned improbabilities, the Grampus voyage has the greater amount. The brief essays of the reviewers do not often point out specific episodes which might be called Poe's extravagances; however, the few that do so generally identify episodes which today can be explained as efforts to gain readership or to indulge in ironic ridicule. The secretion of Pym in the hold, questioned by William Burton (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 40-41), was aimed at a juvenile audience, and contemporaneous reviews show that its clever explanations did not pass muster with the other half of his audience that Poe sidelined momentarily. The Roger's ghost episode, objectionable to the British Era, (Vann 43), has the same weakness. The gap between the two audiences was too much to bridge. The cannibalistic lottery episode actually had

champions in England in the Monthly Review and the Atlas (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 49,51). When some reviewers used the term "amusing" and "clever" they appear to have had in mind such manipulated elements of plot as Augustus finding a toothpick to substitute for a pen, his discovery of a pocket-knife with which to cut a hole in the floor to rescue Pym, and the timely aid of Tiger in subduing the mutineers on the point of killing Augustus. Poe was intent on heaping action for the reader; sometimes the linkage was less than adequate.

Poe modified his approach as he went. With the Jane Guy segment, Pym becomes more than "a sea story." It becomes a story of polar voyage, and Poe tries to deliver on the title's promise of adventures in the vicinity of the South Pole. Actually it is a transitional segment consisting of history and travelogue, necessary to show the passage of time and to place Tsalal at the eighty-fourth parallel. Critics are agreed that Poe intended to take advantage of the interest in the United States polar expedition (Pollin 18-19, Hammond 15, Ridgely and Haverstick 17). There is even the suggestion that Poe was under pressure from Harpers to time his novel to take advantage of the interest in the expedition.⁵ In his lengthy January 1837 review of the Congressional speech of Jeremiah Reynolds, a leading proponent of South Seas exploration, Poe notes that "the public mind is at length thoroughly alive on the subject"

(Essays 1253). Allusions to the Lewis and Clark Expedition in Pym seek to link the novel to its exploratory mission, as does Poe's selection from Reynolds's address to Congress reminding them of Jefferson's instructions, "a model worthy of all imitation" (Essays 1246). There is a hint of Manifest Destiny in Poe's declaration in his August 1836 Messenger essay on the South-Sea expedition: "Who can say, viewing the present rapid growth of our population, that the Rocky Mountains shall forever constitute the western boundary of our republic, or that it shall not stretch its dominion from sea to sea" (Essays 1231). Poe's admiration for Reynolds and news of the ships being readied in Norfolk may have led him to think of Polar waters as a setting for a novel, though in the first two stages of the novel we hear only of the South Seas and not the vicinity of the Pole. Only a seed may have found ground in 1836, but there was no shortage of events to nurture the seed thereafter.

Moved by the speech of Reynolds, in May of 1836 Congress authorized the United States Exploring Expedition to the Antarctic. Though President Andrew Jackson hoped the expedition would sail in October 1836, it remained becalmed and a center of controversy for two years. There was controversy about its fitting and manning, several officers rejected appointment to the expedition, and from July 1837 to January 1838 there was an unseemly public debate in the New York newspapers between Reynolds and the Secretary of

the Navy, Mahlon Dickerson. The ships finally sailed under a substitute commander, Lieutenant Wilkes, with instructions from a new Secretary of the Navy, a friend of Poe, J.K. Paulding, reading in part: "Although the primary object of the Expedition is the promotion of the great interest of commerce and navigation, yet you will take all occasions, not incompatible with the great purposes of your undertaking to extend the bounds of science, and promote the acquisition of knowledge" (Bertrand 159-65). To an extent, the later themes of the novel reflect the ambitious goals of the expedition.

The juvenile element of the tale is largely past. Increasingly, Pym is shown as an adult. While his age is still juvenile, and cannot be changed, he takes on a more mature outlook and displays considerable zeal, even successfully persuading the captain when scurvy and shortage of fuel force him to consider changing course to the northward:

I warmly pressed upon him the expediency of preserving, at least for a few days longer, in the direction we were now holding. So tempting an opportunity of solving the great problem in regard to an Antarctic continent had never yet been afforded to man, and I confess that I felt myself bursting with indignation at the timid and ill-timed suggestions of our commander. I believe, indeed, that what I could not refrain from saying to him on this head had the effect of inducing him to push on. (166)

Poe's extensive use of Benjamin Morrell's Narrative of Four Voyages is common knowledge. His choice may have been dictated in part by the permissive attitude of the copyright

holder, Harper Brothers, to borrowing by writers preparing manuscripts for submission (Ridgely, "Growth" 32). It was a dependable source and would serve both as interesting description and as a transition to Tsalal. Foreshadowing his own discoveries to come, Pym presents Morrell's discovery of easier passage through warmer waters on entering the Antarctic Circle. "I have given his ideas respecting these matters somewhat at length," explains Pym, "that the reader may have an opportunity of seeing how far they were borne out by my own subsequent experience" (161).

The Tsalal segment of Pym is a logical continuation of the novel as tale of adventure but also evidence of Poe's broadening vision of the novel as genre. Pym gains strength through variety, challenging the reader's imagination, but one also sees evidence of irony mixed with emulation. Poe blends narrative types. Going beyond the travelogue, Pym partakes of the Defoesque adventure of survival, social commentary through irony, spectacle common to romance, and what we now call "speculative fiction." Pym moves from the factual base of the probable into the area of high imagination. Science mixes with myth as Poe remembers the promise of his title and engineers Pym's escape from Tsalal, dispatching him "still farther south." Understandably, the markedly diverse elements of the novel have attracted diverse groups of critics ready to read the novel in their own ways and against the background of a variety of

theories. The reading of the tale as an adventure novel written with an eye to popularity informs several of these diverse readings.

The factual weight of the novel is carried naturally into the Tsalal segment. As Pollin has shown in the "Notes and Comments" pages of his book, the generous use of Benjamin Morrell continues from the Jane Guy segment. For reasons of believability, Poe sought to build a framework of facts suitable as a background for his plot. As a Harpers author, Morrell was available as source and example. His book was a best-seller in 1832 (Pollin, Edgar Allan Poe 9) and had retained its popularity. For Poe, it probably was also a recommendation that the work was used by writers he admired, Reynolds and John Stephens, in the creation of their popular books. He chose his facts from the "authorities" and smoothly worked in his own imaginative contribution, blending the two. Thus, on the authority of Morrell, the first paragraph of the 18th chapter describes a warm sea covered with warm air and a current "setting towards the pole at the rate of a mile an hour" (167). Several large whales swim in the water and "innumerable flights of the albatross" pass overhead. Seamlessly, Poe adds the contribution of his own fantasy: "a bush full of red berries," and even more striking, a carcass of a "singular-looking land animal":

It was three feet in length, and but six inches in height, with four very short legs, the feet armed with

long claws of a brilliant scarlet, and resembling coral in substance. The body was covered with a straight silky hair, perfectly white. The tail was peaked like that of a rat, and about a foot and a half long. The head resembled a cat's with the exception of the ears--these were flapped like the ears of a dog. The teeth were of the same brilliant scarlet as the claws. (167)

Morrell's southward current and Poe's strange animal, blended here, will both be utilized to move the plot later. Poe continues to use a "factual tone" even though "what is being described is absurd," notes Geoffrey Rans (93). The exact dates, the count of the days, the precise latitude and the even narration contribute to the "factual tone."

The Defoesque element, the adventure of survival, enters again in the final chapters, and it too gains from the "factual tone." After the terrible landslide, Pym and Peters, in hiding, discover a small spring of water and after slaking "the burning thirst that now consumed [them]," find some bushes with nuts that proved "palatable," and with the greatest luck cut down with a "Bowie knife" "a large bird of bittern species" big enough to "provide a supply of food enough to last . . . for a week" (188). The successful camouflaging of the hiding place with brushwood and their concealment for "six or seven days" is believable because of the kind of detail one finds in the following passage:

We kindled a fire without difficulty by rubbing two pieces of dry wood together, the one soft, the other hard. The bird we had taken in such good season proved excellent eating, although somewhat tough. It was not an oceanic fowl, but a species of bittern, with jet black and grizzly plumage, and diminutive wings in proportion to its bulk As long as this fowl lasted we suffered nothing from our situation; but it

was now entirely consumed, and it became absolutely necessary that we should look out for provision. The filberts would not satisfy the cravings of hunger, afflicting us, too, with severe gripping of the bowels, and, if freely indulged in, with violent headache. We had seen several large tortoises near the seashore . . . It was resolved, therefore, to make an attempt at descending. (191)

The narrative tone conveys a sense of realism and the events are believable because of the detail of presentation, although luck plays an overly generous part in moving the tale. Luck brings them not only a Bowie knife with which to silence the squawking of the bird at a crucial moment, but also a pocketbook and pencil to record the shapes of the mysterious chasms.

In recent times Pym has been seen as social commentary by some, but imaginative description of an unusual society can also be seen as merely entertaining action on the part of the author. The novel continues as a tale of adventure, with a wider range of action and effect. In a time of extraordinary change, current interests, social and intellectual, can be expected to steer the author in the direction of literary opportunity. Poe's goal is more literary than reformative; he used these interests to his advantage but may also be betraying his social stance. John Carlos Rowe argues that even though the Southern Literary Messenger's 1836 review of the pro-slavery books of James Kirk Paulding and William Drayton now appears to be by Judge Beverly Tucker and not Poe, the latter's works need to be examined for pro-slavery bias. "Poe's proslavery

sentiments," declares Rowe, "are fundamental to his literary production" (117). Prejudices of "racism, sexism, and aristocratic pretensions," he continues, "are finely woven into the fabric of his art" (118). "It is hard to believe that any serious scholar could still doubt that Poe supported the institution of slavery," says Bernard Rosenthal (29). Poe's probable interest in slavery and possible alarm about insurrection should be seen against the background of contemporaneous events, including emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies in 1834 and Nat Turner's rebellion and execution near Richmond in late 1831. The Messenger's Paulding-Drayton review notes that "Recent events in the West Indies and the parallel movements here give an awful importance to these thoughts in our minds" (qtd. in Rowe 123-24). Kenneth Hovey asserts that Poe was conscious and proud of his "Southernness" and was a defender of Virginia. In the "revolt" of the Tsalalians in Pym, he declares, Poe presents "the image of black insurrection . . . [that] had haunted Southerners since the Nat Turner uprising . . ." (349).

The Tsalalians are not exemplary people, but Poe's purpose in so presenting them is not clear. He may be presenting a biased warning, or he may be attempting to portray an exotic race while allowing for reports that the natives of the South Seas are aggressive (Poe, Essays 1236). Even as early as the mutiny account in Pym, the only

black visible, the cook, is "in all respects . . . a perfect demon" (86). He is the perpetrator of the "most horrible butchery," as he stands on the gangway with an axe, "striking each victim on the head as he was forced over the side of the vessel." In this manner, he kills twenty-two. The "savages" of Tsalal are blacks who are described as having "wooly hair," "a more muscular and brawny frame" than Europeans, and a "jet black" complexion. The weapons of the Tsalalian are primitive and their speech a mere "jabbering." Many go around entirely naked and all live in primitive huts. They have a social hierarchy based on power, with the armed wampoos, "the tenants of the black skin palaces," at the top. Chief Too-wit is absolute, and he is fiendishly efficient. He is disarmingly deceptive when he explains the apparent lack of arms with "Mattee non we pa pa si--meaning there is no need of arms when all are brothers" (180). Yet the canoes have clubs hidden on the floor. Two-wit's trickery in leading the whites to their doom and his creation of a massive landslide is proof of both his unscrupulousness and his wiles. "In truth," records Pym, "from everything I could see of these wretches, they appeared to be the most wicked, hypocritical, vindictive, bloodthirsty, and altogether fiendish race of men upon the face of the globe" (201). Is Pym a Southerner's warning? Or is it, perhaps, a satiric examination of the values and fears of his own civilization?

Either way, Poe is handling an issue of interest to the contemporary reader.

The arguments for ironic or satiric meanings behind Pym are plausible. Poe had successfully mixed these elements with humor in recent writing. While the Harpers declined to publish his short stories in 1836, Paulding, conveying their thinking, complimented Poe on his ability and advised him to "apply his fine humor, and his extensive acquirements, to more familiar subjects of satire; to the faults and foibles of our own people, their peculiarities of habits and manners, the ridiculous affectations and extravagances of the fashionable English Literature of the day . . ." (Thomas 193). Pym presents evidence which can be used to argue for Poe as a social critic. Evelyn Hinz and John Teunissen have made a case for Poe's use of primitivism for social criticism. Defining the segment of Pym through the death of Augustus (ch. 13) as the first part and the rest as the "atavistic" or second part, they write: "The second part of The Narrative can be seen to proceed out of the first part when primitivism is recognized to be Poe's major concern. The first part establishes cultural failure, and points the need for a new symbolic idiom; the second part provides the experience of a primitive culture and thus the materials from which new symbols may be fashioned" (19). But it is hard to believe that the historical Poe, proud of his Southern heritage, is seeing his society in cultural

failure. Perhaps Poe is not depicting a failed culture but one in need of infusion.

Intercourse with the Tsalalians is indeed ironic. The Jane Guy's sailors plan to profit at the expense of the natives; they make an unequal bargain for the biche de mer, ironically under the shadow of their guns. They give the natives trinkets in exchange for useful goods--"blue beads, brass trinkets, nails knives, and pieces of red cloth" in exchange for tortoises, ducks, fish, shrimp, eggs, and vegetables--yet they expect "good faith" in return. Their altruism and brotherhood are non-existent and the absence demeans their own culture. When Pym recalls his party's misplaced trust based on "the long-sustained pretension of friendship kept up by these infamous wretches" (181), ironically he also remembers that his party headed for Klock-klock "armed to their teeth . . . with . . . muskets, pistols and cutlasses" and left as a base a ship whose "boarding nettings were up, the guns double-shotted with grape and canister, and the swivels loaded with canisters of musket-balls" (180). Primitive as the faith of the natives may be, in contrast to the inhumanity and self-serving superficial religious utterances of the sailors, the Tsalalians show a firm adherence to that faith. They show every sign of holding as sacred all things white; and when the cook cuts a gash in the ship's deck, Too-wit, who cries in sympathy with what he takes to be a fellow creature,

falls to "patting and smoothing the gash with his hand and washing it from a bucket of sea-water which stood by." Pym, for his part, declares this "ignorance" and "could not help thinking some of [the sympathy] affected" (169). Poe is not making saints out of the Tsalalians but warning that American smugness is no assurance of virtue. With respect to the literary market, he is following a very old tradition in literature. This segment in particular can be seen as a response to the Harpers suggestion, mentioned above, that he apply his fine humor to "the faults and foibles of our own people." Poe, too, must have realized the potential for such writing.

Toward the end, the tale turns into a typical romance. Its large battle, the pyrotechnics of the Jane Guy's explosion, the resultant transfer of the red-clawed white animal from the hold to the shore, the search through the hieroglyphic chasms, the precarious descent from the hill, and the escape poleward in a boat using paddles for masts and shirts for sails, all create an atmosphere reminding one of Hawthorne's observation in the Preface to The House of the Seven Gables, about a decade later, that "when a writer calls his work a Romance, it need hardly be observed that he wishes to claim a certain latitude, both as to its fashion and material, which he would not have felt himself entitled to assume, had he professed to be writing a Novel." Tsalal is certainly not the realm of the "probable"; Poe, with his

tendency to overindulge in the "marvellous," could use some of Hawthorne's advice that the writer of a romance "mingle the Marvellous rather as a slight, delicate, and evanescent flavor, than as any portion of the actual substance of the dish offered to the Public." Ten thousand natives attack the Jane Guy, a thousand are killed, another thousand "desparately mangled" in the explosion that creates a tower of flame a quarter of a mile high. But what the power of the Jane Guy fails to accomplish, the rout of the natives, is accomplished by the mysterious reappearance of the red-clawed animal, its white carcass dispersing eight thousand men in fright.

Mixing the fantastic with the realism of history Poe presents the episode of the hieroglyphic chasms. The mystery of the Tsalalian hieroglyphic chasms suggested by John L. Stephen's Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea and the Holy Land and Rev. Alexander Keith's Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Religion was intended to tap into the growing interest in Egyptology. Stephens had used Keith's book, so Poe had to be familiar with both as he wrote his review of the former in 1836. Besides, both were Harper writers, the latter's work appearing in a Harper edition of 1832. The popularity of the two must have suggested the writers as sources for Pym. Judging by the listings in the National Union Catalog, by the end of 1838, Incidents appeared in numerous editions, including one Harper edition

describing itself as the "11th ed." Middle Eastern travel reports aroused antiquarian interest which was secular as well as religious. Since Jean-Francois Champollion's deciphering of the Rosetta Stone in the 1820's, American interest in Egypt had been growing and showing itself in literary allusions and the display of artifacts ranging from papyri to mummies. An Egyptian museum was established in Baltimore in 1832. Such was the interest by 1842 that George Gliddon, American vice-consul in Cairo and a facilitator of Stephens's travel, drew audiences of up to 2000 per performance for his two-year tour of lectures on Egyptian antiquities (Irwin 4). The hieroglyphic chasms provide the reader with a vicarious tour of a part of ancient Egypt and a chance to put himself in the shoes of Champollion. The episode is an invitation to "ratiocination." The addition of the Keith reading of the Biblical prophecy with its promises of doom, raises the focus from the antique to the supernatural. The epical suggestions could be logically expected to captivate the reading public in Poe's time.⁶

Judging by the reviews, it was not the strong element of adventure that angered the critics, it was the overdose of the "marvellous," the excess of romance. Adventure was expected, but "fable" was not. The word "marvellous" appears in the reviews with extraordinary frequency as do the allusions to Sinbad the Sailor and Gulliver's Travels.

When the reviewers are specific, they turn to such elements as the scarlet-and-white land animal and the veined water of Tsalal (Pollin, Poe's "Narrative" 51; Vann 43). Ironically, some of what Poe had included to attract readers succeeded in turning away at least some critics.

The final episode of the novel, the journey "still farther south," which evidently fell in the category of the "marvellous" for most readers, has the ingredients of "science fiction" or what scholars are now calling in broader terms "speculative fiction." The tale is still simply a "romance" from the nineteenth-century perspective, but also reflective of the popular pseudo-science behind fiction such as Symzonia and, a work of which at least one reviewer was reminded, Richard Adams Locke's newspaper hoax of 1835 about discoveries in the moon (Pollin, "Pym's Narrative" 9). Propelled by "constant" wind and "strong" current, Pym's boat floats over a remarkably mild and ice-free ocean toward the Pole. The cataract, the bubbling white ash, and the white birds flying through the mist-curtain, are carefully calculated by Poe for this "region of novelty and wonder." In this world of white, the black Nu-Nu dies of terror engendered by the whiteness. Finally, there arises before them "a shrouded human figure" of majestic size and with skin "the perfect whiteness of the snow."

Poe may have been familiar with Symzonia and its highly

moral, white-garbed and white-skinned people, the "Internals" (108), but even if he was not, he certainly knew of Symmes's "holes in the poles" theory (Pollin, Edgar Allan Poe 356-57) and was aware of his popularity. There was sustained public notice of Symmes and Reynolds in the Eastern states in the twenties and early thirties (Mitterling 67-100). Poe's interest in Reynolds must have enhanced his interest in Symmes, since Reynolds was a protege of the former. One could reasonably argue that the final episode of the novel is another example of Poe's mining the vein of the popular. Perhaps the wonders that Pym finally sees are born of the imaginative creation of Symmes. Or perhaps they are, according to Dameron, "a series of plausible, if exotic, experiences" (42) based upon narratives, especially William Scoresby's Journal of a Voyage to the Northern Whale Fishery of 1823. There is also a supplementary approach that the idealistic side in Poe follows his personal "sense of an ending," that the reader be given a visionary experience, an impression of the meeting point between the waking world and the world of dreams (Eakin 151). If this is true, then the practical and the ideal come together in this ending.

Though there is a "Note" after this, for most readers the story of Pym actually ends with the glimpse of the white figure and his polar world--and for some it ends prematurely. Despite the "Note" and often because of it,

some reviewers of the day complained about the ending. The British edition omitted the paragraph presenting the white giant. The Philadelphia Alexander's Weekly Messenger facetiously wondered if the exploring expedition would be recalled since it had been "rendered wholly unnecessary by Pym's discoveries" (Pollin, "Three More Early Notices" 33). A famous later view is the response of Henry James, that "the climax fails--fails because it stops short, and stops short for want of connexions. There are no connexions; not only, I mean, in the sense of further statement, but of our own further relation to the elements, which hang in the void: whereby we see the effect lost, the imaginative effort wasted" (xix-xx). On the other hand, the suggestive indefiniteness Poe incorporated has gained a belated popularity with twentieth-century critics, proposing readings linked to modern literary theories.⁷ Perhaps Poe was tired of catering to popular taste. Perhaps he had a second volume in mind. More likely, as evidenced by the almost simultaneous publication of the novel and the sailing of the South Seas fleet, the affairs of the Exploring Expedition having come to a head, Harpers judged any delay would cause the novel to miss the tide. For a work of topical interest, popularity could be controlled by timing. Once again, the marketplace won.

The closing "Note," with its announcement of the loss of the final chapters, the recent death of Pym, and the

inability to meet Peters, did not prove satisfying, at least to the critics. At worst, it led to charges of hoaxing the reader and continues to do so today (e.g. Ridgely and Haverstick 79, Hammond 7, Thompson 176-77). But often it was tolerated at face value, though there was a sense of disappointment. "As a romance," declared the London Metropolitan Magazine, "some portions of . . . [Pym] 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" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 48). The Atlas does not decry the "Note" as a perpetration of a hoax but as an escape from the consequences of a poor finish: "The fact seems to be that having brought his narrative to a point of extravagant peril . . . [Pym] did not know how to bring himself home in safety, and so stopped all at once . . ." (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 51). The London Spectator echoes the thought, suspecting that the writer was "at a loss how to go on" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 53). The English Torch is probably representative of most magazines, British and American, when it accepts the "Note" as a "trick to coax belief" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 52).

The "Note" provided symmetry when coupled with the Preface, but mainly, as some contemporaneous reviews suggest, it was intended to allow the story to end at a high

point while providing a partial denouement. Evidently, Poe's reading of the public's willingness to accept this device was somewhat flawed. As Pollin (Edgar Allan Poe 357) and Dameron (34) have noted, ambitious Poe may also have been setting the stage for a continuation of the story to ride the interest in polar exploration to double the distance. Probably, also, neither author nor publisher wanted any findings of the Wilkes Expedition to date the book too quickly. The expedition and the book were launched almost simultaneously. Publicity and the appeal of the unknown could be expected to attract a variety of readers. Poe's specific reference to the expedition in the "Note" beckons to the reader's imagination while linking the novel to the expedition: "The loss of two or three final chapters . . . is the more deeply to be regretted, as, it cannot be doubted, they contained matter relative to the Pole itself, or at least to regions in its very near proximity; and as, too, the statements of the author in relation to these regions may shortly be verified or contradicted by means of the governmental expedition now preparing for the Southern Ocean" (207).

Poe had good expectations of Pym. When, in 1840, in his letter to William Burton, he described the novel as "a very silly book," his self-deprecating remark was made in exaggerated humility because of the latter's hostile review. The Harper firm's 1836 comments on his prospects for

publication pointed to the marketplace as judge in a realistic world. His own observation too recommended that he study the popular example. Pym as an adventure story is born of Poe's intimations of the realities of publishing. The episodic nature of Pym with its abundance of events, believable and marvelous, points to Poe's acceptance of reality, but there are also other levels of the novel. While paying tribute to the popular, he struck out at the superficiality of the popular. Through his double voice he enriched an ostensibly simple story.

Notes

¹On balance, the reviews are positive. With entertainment as an ideal, even the announcement of the "incredibles" of the tale is often amused rather than hostile. "Pym's adventures have been infinitely more astonishing than any before recorded," admits the Family Magazine (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 46). The novel includes "adventures almost as surprising as those of Peter Wilkins, or Sinbad the Sailor," according to the New York Evening Post (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 45). The Philadelphia Saturday Courier is reminded of no less a teller of tall tales than the Baron Munchausen (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 42). Whether it is actual truth, at least The Star does not care: "Let every man fathom Mr. Pym's secret for himself, say we. He tells some wonderful things, that's certain" (Pollin, "Poe's Narrative" 10).

²The stages of the composition of Pym as proposed by Joseph Ridgely and Iola Haverstick, based largely on the source material used, are reasonable suggestions but they must be taken as approximations because issues of continuity and mixing of sources make distinctions difficult. They identify the stages as follows: (1) the Messenger text, (2) ch. 2, para. 4 through ch. 9, (3) ch. 10 through ch. 15, (4) ch. 16 to the end, except the initial ch. 23 and the "Note," which constitute the fifth stage.

³Poe's sometimes awkward sensationalism reminds one of the satirical advice he had Mr. Blackwood give the aspiring writer Psyche Zenobia in "How to Write a Blackwood Article." Mr. Blackwood discusses the secret of composing "a genuine Blackwood article of the sensation stamp" and recommends that the young writer get herself into an unusual "scrape" such as "tumbling out of a balloon" or getting "knocked in the head, or run over by an omnibus, or bitten by a mad dog, or drowned in a gutter." Michael Allen, in Poe and the British Magazine Tradition, is of the opinion that "Tortured with uncertainty about the taste and value of his own fiction of the same kind . . . [Poe] could make of Blackwood's fiction a surrogate, and by lashing it achieve both the satisfaction and the protection of self-parody" (126).

⁴Poe's extensive use of the chronicles has been summarized by Pollin (Edgar Allan Poe 22-23).

the span of the launching of the polar expedition. If the unhappiness of the Harpers with Poe in 1837 and 1838, as reported by Charles Anthon later, is connected to Poe's "dilatatory conduct" (Ridgely and Haverstick 79) the conduct was probably troublesome to the Harpers because it threatened to leave the book behind the tide of interest aroused by reports of the expedition's sailing (in 1837 and 1838). Indeed, the very acceptance of the novel by the Harpers was probably based on its topical appeal and, as Hammond speculates, it was written "at least in part, specifically to exploit a timely market, and that its composition was rushed during the spring of 1837" to meet the expedition's departure date (16).

Modern Christian readings flow persuasively from Poe's tale of adventure (Kopley, "Very 'Profound Under-Current'" 147 ff.).

It is a tribute to the creative ambiguity of Poe that one figure, taken as a symbol, has served a variety of modern literary theories. The "shrouded human figure" has been variously interpreted, with the range extending from Poe's own shadow (Irwin 205) to Christ (Kopley, "The 'Very Profound Under-Current'"), from "blank paper" (Ricardou 4) to various divinities (Kopley, "The Secret" 215-16). The readings range from deconstructionist, through Christian to mythic.

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