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"[59.]", inserted in ink another hand. Line 3: the first letter of "character" may be a capital. Blake transcribed it as lower-case, Sanborn as a capital.

**Substantive Notes**

**Lines 3-4.** The address, which Thoreau delivered in Boston on November 1 and in Worcester two days later, was first published under the title "A Plea for Captain John Brown" in *Echoes of Harper's Ferry*, edited by James Redpath (Boston: Thayer and Eldridge, 1860). It appears on pp. 409-440 of Vol. IV of *The Writings*.

**Lines 7-8.** Brown, who had been captured on October 16, was sentenced on November 2 and executed on December 2.

**Line 8.** "The sooner the better": *A Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*, p. 345.

**Lines 8-9.** In response to an inquiry by a certain Mr. Powers, who seems to have come into possession of Thoreau's autograph letter, Higginson wrote in 1902 that he had been "absent in N.H." (undoubtedly a misprint for N.Y.) on October 30, 1859, "bringing down Mrs. Brown in the hope that she would induce her husband to consent to being rescued." Whether or not Higginson was in Worcester when Thoreau delivered his "Plea," he did not attend, for he told Powers he suspected that "Thoreau's plan of the meeting... failed" (Higginson to Powers, July 25, 1902, printed in Cameron, *Companion*, p. 232; see also Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays* [Boston, 1898], pp. 226-228).

**Line 10.** November 3, the date of Thoreau's address in Worcester, fell on Thursday.

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**J. V. Ridgely and Iola S. Haverstick**

**Chartless Voyage: The Many Narratives of Arthur Gordon Pym**

**How Many Narratives Are There in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym?** In a recent article1 L. Moffitt Cecil argues that Poe's longest tale is "actually two stories"—the adventures of Pym aboard the Grampus and the account of polar exploration—and that Poe successfully hoaxed his readers by palming off "two separate short narratives as though they were one." Our own investigation into the composition of Pym—grounded both upon some of the evidence which Professor Cecil marshals and upon some new data—has convinced us, however, that this view is inadequate to explain the many puzzles of the text. For the fact is that neither the chronicle of the voyage of the Grampus nor the sequence which follows Pym's rescue by the *Jane Guy* is consistent even within itself. Each part promises actions which never occur; each has confusing shifts in characterization; each contains many discrepancies in factual detail. The only explanation which will account for this unusually flawed text is that Poe worked on it at several periods between the end of 1836 and the early summer of 1838, that he changed his mind several times about the direction of his story line, and that he made a hurried but inefficient attempt to turn his disconnected narrative into a whole at the very moment when the volume was being put to press.

Drawing upon the admittedly scanty biographical and other external information, the studies of the sources which Poe used, and a line-by-line analysis of the basic texts,2 we have concluded that at least five

stages in the process of composition can be identified. Briefly, these are: (1) the *Southern Literary Messenger* text, composed in late 1836 and published in the January and February, 1837, issues; (2) the material following the end of the *Messenger* segment up through the close of Chapter IX, written in April–May, 1837; (3) Chapters X through XV put together probably in late 1837 and early 1838; (4) Chapter XVI to the conclusion, with the omission of Chapter XXIII and the final "Note," composed between March and May, 1838; and (5) Chapters XXIII and the "Note," added to the text in July, 1838. The first two of these stages, we feel, can be reasonably established; the other three are necessarily more conjectural, but the weight of evidence makes them at least plausible. What now follows is a condensed summation of the grounds for each of these divisions.

**Stage I:** The *Messenger* text. Poe undoubtedly began to write *Pym* quite late in 1836. During the course of this year, burdened with his editorial duties on the *Messenger*, he had produced no new fiction; instead, he had been endeavoring to get a publisher to issue a gathering of his early tales. But Harper and Brothers, to whom he had submitted his collection, rejected the project in March, explaining in a later letter that readers decidedly preferred one long, connected story. But Harper and Brothers, to whom he had submitted his collection, rejected the project in March, explaining in a later letter that readers decidedly preferred one long, connected story. Many scholars have seen this advice as the immediate stimulus behind Poe's undertaking a novel; however, as late as September he was still trying to interest another publisher (Harrison Hall) in his tales and made no mention of a long work.

It is more likely that the initial idea of *Pym*—a serial story of adventures aboard ship and in the South Seas—did not occur to him until after he had received for review both Washington Irving's *Astoria* (published in October) and the printed text of J. N. Reynolds' address to Congress in April, 1836, which urged a governmental exploring expedition to southern waters. His lengthy notices of these two works appeared in the January, 1837, *Messenger*; and distinct verbal echoes in *Pym* suggest that composition of the story succeeded completion of the reviews. External evidence also supports this dating. The September issue of the *Messenger* was delayed by the illness both of Poe and of the publisher, Thomas W. White. The November number contained less than four pages of critical notices by Poe; an explanatory note blamed this uncharacteristic brevity on a press problem. 

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4 Letters, I, 103–104.
5 For example, the Lewis and Clark Expedition, mentioned in both the *Irving* and the Reynolds notices, is also alluded to in *Pym* (p. 25). Dirck Peters is the son of an Upsaroka squaw, a tribe named in the *Astoria* review. The sentence in *Pym* beginning "My visions were of shipwreck..." (p. 17) reflects a passage quoted in the Reynolds notice (*The Messenger*, III, 69).

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Poe’s motivation in undertaking a serial narrative may indeed have been the expectation of eventually making it into a book (though the Harper firm had also warned him in June of its disinterest in previously printed material). Much more pressing than any future hope, however, was Poe’s immediate need of money; miserably paid for his editorial duties, he could demand from White an extra sum for each page of creative work. Unfortunately, this was a bounty which would soon be cut off. During late 1836 relations between editor and publisher worsened; Poe’s drinking and their clashes over policy finally drove White to dismiss him on January 3, 1837. Initially Poe ignored this action, since he had been fired and reinstated before; once convinced, however, that White was adament, a desperate Poe began hounding him for payment for copy already submitted. As White complained to a correspondent:

He is continually after me for money. I am sick of his writings as I am of him, and I am inclined to send him up another dozen dollars and with them all his MS., most of which are denominated "stuff." For "A. Gordon Pym" he demanded three dollars a page.

7 *Works*, XVII, 41.

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printed all the text in his possession. Poe, to assure himself presumably had promised to continue the story in later issues, but another word about Pym was ever to appear in the *Messenger*.

In order to understand what Poe did when he resumed composition, it is necessary to try to reconstruct his initial plan. The chief clue is the method of narration. In the January, 1836, *Messenger* he had reviewed a new edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, commenting particularly on Defoe's invention of realistic detail and the resultant creation of total belief in the fiction. "Not one person...in five hundred," he asserted, "has, during the perusal of Robinson Crusoe, the most remote conception that any particle of genius, or even of common talent, has been employed in its creation! Men do not look upon it in the light of a literary performance. Defoe has none of their thoughts—Robinson all...All this is effected by the potent magic of verisimilitude." To write as if he were the Mariner of York, Defoe must have possessed, Poe concluded, "what has been termed the faculty of identification—that dominion exercised by volition over imagination which enables the mind to lose its own, in fictitious individuality." Such observations suggest that he originally planned to publish his own imaginary voyage under the guise of a genuine first-person manuscript (though he was to bury hints of his own authorship in the phonetic similarity between his and Pym's full names and in the mention of "Edgarton"). This ruse of apparent authenticity, though, was unexpectedly spoiled by his break with the *Messenger*; for White in an editorial note credited to Poe "the first number of Arthur Gordon Pym, a sea story," and also placed his name by the title in the table of contents. The shattering of his carefully manipulated illusion is probably one reason why Poe did not continue the tale in the *Messenger* and also why he took such pains to explain away White's attribution in his preface to the book version.

In view of the later history of the text it is interesting to speculate as to the direction the story line would have taken if Poe had pressed on with serial publication. As Professor Cecil rightly observes, Poe himself provides a prospectus in the passage in which Pym speaks of his "prophetic" visions 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" (p. 17). We may assume, then, that he projected sending young Pym and Augustus Barnard on a whaling voyage which was to end with climactic horrors in the South Seas; Pym's dog Tiger would also play a prominent role. But neither Professor Cecil nor any other commentator on *Pym*, to our knowledge, has noted the further evidence of a different original plan which can be found by tabulating the variants between the *Messenger* text and the book version of these passages. For in the *Messenger* account Pym has passed only his fourteenth (instead of his sixteenth) birthday; the fitting out of the *Grampus* begins "three or four months" after the *Armel* episode (instead of "About eighteen months after"); the whaling voyage of the two "schoolboys" is due to start "about the middle of April (April, 1827)" (instead of "the middle of June"). *Pym* is thus originally a young teenager. Moreover, there is nowhere in the *Messenger* narrative any hint of incredible polar adventures to come; emphasis throughout is on the matter-of-fact, and the details of the January installment even suggest a directly autobiographical origin. We can only conclude that Poe was forced later to alter the *Messenger* text because the original character of Pym and the schedule of his adventures had become inconsistent with what he afterwards composed. Even so, he left a number of puzzles for the attentive reader.

**Stage II:** From the end of the *Messenger* text to the end of Chapter IX; April–May, 1837. Not long after his break with White, Poe moved with his wife and aunt to New York. The biographical record for this period is irritatingly brief, yet several of the known facts bear directly upon the continuing growth of *Pym*: (1) On March 30 Poe attended a dinner given by New York booksellers and proposed a toast to "The monthlies of Gotham—their distinguished editors, and their vigorous..." (2) In the New York *Daily Eagle* of April 17, 1837, Poe published a draft of a letter to a newspaper editor that seems to have influenced the *Messenger* account of the Pimpernel; (3) A Captain Barnard is mentioned in Reynolds' address. One other possible source for the name, and for the projected plot development is *Narrative of the Sufferings and Adventures of Captain Charles H. Barnard in a Voyage Round the World...* (New York, 1829). This account has been reprinted in *The Sea, the Ship, and the Sailor* (Salem, 1925). Like Pym, Barnard has a dog named Tiger, who helps him to procure food when he is abandoned in the Falkland Islands.

Since most of these alterations were included by R. A. Stewart in his textual notes to the Harrison edition, it is surprising that they are so little known. There are several minor changes in punctuation and spelling and some verbal recastings, but the main differences between *Messenger* and book versions (besides those cited) are: A new sentence was added at the beginning of the second paragraph of the present Chapter I—"I will relate one of these adventures by way of introduction to a longer and more momentous narrative." Several changes were made in nautical terminology—"steerage comings," for example, becoming "forecastle comings." It is interesting that the year of the voyage was not itself altered; in 1827 Poe himself made a journey—from Richmond to Boston—in March and April, John Allan thought he had run away to sea (Quinn, *Poe: A Critical Biography*, p. 116).
(2) The May issue of the Knickerbocker carried a notice which listed the "Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket" among the books which the "Brothers Harper have nearly ready for publication." (3) On May 27 Poe wrote to Charles Anthon, professor of classics at Columbia College, asking for information about Hebrew in connection with a review of J. L. Stephens' Arabia Petræa which was eventually published in the October, 1837, New York Review. Poe's reading of Stephens would be one of the several influences observable in the later stages of Pym's adventures. (4) On June 10 Harper and Brothers copyrighted a title which was entered on the record as "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon P.Y.M. [sic] of Nantucket." The peculiarities of this document will be discussed later.

From these few facts we may try to reconstruct Poe's progress with Pym during the first five months of 1837. There is little doubt, first, that he went to New York (before the end of February) hoping to find employment on a literary magazine; his work on the Messenger had made his name well known and had brought him into contact with prominent litterateurs in the city. But his slashing reviews had also made an enemy South Seas, of Lewis Gaylord Clark, leader of a powerful literary clique and editor reveals what appears to be other writing below these words and deletion marks. We may infer, then, this sequence: first, an original short subtitle, which varied from the first lines of the final subtitle, was entered on June 10, 1837; second, when the book was deposited on August 1, 1838, the recorder turned back to the copyright entry and tried (by erasure or overwriting) to make the original subtitle conform to the printed subtitle, but—being unable to do so successfully—deleted these three lines and started over. Whether or not this is the fact, Poe clearly did not furnish the full descriptive subtitle to his publishers in May or June, 1837. The implication is, of course, that he had not progressed much further with the book itself.

Is it possible, then, to determine just how much he had completed by this date? Here the preface—which is signed "A. G. Pym"—affords further substantial clues. Though dated "July, 1838," to match the eventual publication date of the book, its composition likely belongs to the period of April—May, 1837. In the opening sentence Pym refers to

12 The toast was recorded by the New York American, Commercial Advertiser and Evening Post, all of April 3, 1837.
13 Knickerbocker, IX (May, 1837), 529.
14 Works, XVII, 42-43.
15 Copyrights in the Southern District of New York, 1836-1838, No. 113, p. 172.
his return to the United States “a few months ago”—a “fact” true in relation to the January–February Messenger text but a discrepancy by July, 1838. There are other peculiarities: (1) Pym asserts that his adventures occurred in “the South Seas and elsewhere,” a statement consistent with the original designation of the Grampus. (Though “South Seas” was sometimes vaguely attached to any southern ocean, it generally referred to the South Pacific—which Pym never enters.) (2) Pym explains away the attribution of the Messenger section to Poe by stating that he had allowed Poe to draw up “the earlier portion...under the garb of fiction.” But White, not Poe, had given the game away by calling the narrative “a story.” Moreover, this attempted reversal of “fact” and “fiction” (i.e., Poe cast an “air of fable” over his part, whereas Pym soberly recounts “fact”) is flatly contradicted by the text itself: it is the Messenger portions which are plausible and the later chapters which recount fabulous events. Actually this “ruse” (Poe’s own term) is an inept (and even comic) maneuver designed to allow him to continue with his hoax of presenting a “veracious” narrative under the name of Pym. (3) Pym pointedly refers to the “first few pages which were written by Mr. Poe,” and he adds that even those readers who have not seen the Messenger will perceive the change of style and will know “where his portion ends and my own commences.” Professor Cecil argues that most readers would likely take this statement to mean a change of claimed authorship at the beginning of the Jane Guy voyage; but it can be demonstrated that there is an observable break just where Pym/Poe says it occurs: at the end of the Messenger text.

It may be objected that the reference in the preface to the “Antarctic Ocean” forecasts scenes which we claim belong to a later stage of composition. But this and other statements (like the mention of Peters as the only other survivor) could well have been inserted just before the text was set; a study of the context shows that they are parenthetical. But this and other statements (like the mention of Peters as the only other survivor) could well have been inserted just before the text was set; a study of the context shows that they are parenthetical.

Certainly the whole purport of the preface is to follow up the voyage account—in this case probably from Remarkable Events and Remarkable Shipwrecks. (3) This whole section, significantly, is padded with extraneous borrowed factual material—notably those passages dealing with stowage (pp. 68–72) and laying-to (pp. 82–84). Such deadweight can perhaps be defended as a contribution to the desired effect of verisimilitude but more probably Poe simply inserted it to add quickly to the manuscript bulk. (4) The narrative method, originally subjective in tone and occasionally heavily Latinate in diction (see the opening of Chapter II), becomes in this section progressively more detached in point of view and simpler in expression. Poe even resorts to logbooklike jottings at the end of Chapter VI and the beginning of Chapter VII. (5) There is a marked discrepancy between the character of Peters as he is introduced in the paragraph which follows the Messenger text and as he later appears. Much, for example, is made of his “ferocious” aspect, of his being a half-breed Indian, of his bald and indented head (covered with a wig of animal fur), and of doubts among the crew about his sanity. At this stage Poe seems to have planned to have Peters accompany Pym and Augustus on at least part of their adventures—Pym asserts that he has described him so minutely because he will “have frequent occasion to mention him hereafter in the course of my narrative” (p. 53)—but this preparation went for nought, since the Peters of the drifting sequence and the Tsala episode has become a different man.

Other more blatant discrepancies between these chapters and the rest of the text strengthen the assumption that Poe was composing rapidly, without rechecking what he had already written or scrupulously plotting

18 For parallel passages, see Huntress, American Literature, XVI, 22. Short voyage narratives, such as the ones from which Poe drew, were often reprinted in various collections; and it is not easy to establish just which collection he actually saw.

19 At the end of Chapter XXI Pym says of himself and Peters: “We were the only living white men upon the island.”
out future events. Some of these errors are: (1) As nearly every reader notices, Pym refers in Chapter V to learning something from Augustus “many years” later. But Augustus, of course, dies in Chapter XIII just a few weeks later in the time sequence. Obviously Poe had not yet decided to do away with this major character. (2) Tiger, Pym’s faithful if somewhat erratic dog, has an important role during the retaking of the vessel (pp. 94–95). He is briefly mentioned once more, in Chapter IX (p. 102), and then vanishes from the story without a trace. Did Poe simply forget him? Did he believe he had disposed of him? (3) There are variations between the description of the note from Augustus to Pym as given in the Messenger version (pp. 39–41) and in Chapter V (pp. 60–61); and (4) there are similar discrepancies in the narration of Augustus’ movements in the hold (pp. 45–46) and (pp. 63–66).

All of these points of difference between this section and preceding and succeeding material indicate that Poe was not thinking very far ahead about the specifics of his plot and may simply have lost interest in a story he was having difficulty in completing. It is quite possible, of course, that other factors—illness, periods of drinking, job seeking, work on the Stephens review—kept him from giving full attention to Pym. The certainty is that the Harpers did not have enough copy to publish when they expected to (and did not have for more than a year to come) and that Poe for the time being again left his story dangling.

Stage III: Chapter X through Chapter XV; probably late 1837 and early 1838. This is the most difficult of the five stages to date and to justify; yet obviously Poe wrote more of his manuscript after failing the publishers, and these six chapters vary enough from other portions of the text to be considered separately. Unfortunately, almost nothing is recorded of Poe’s movements from June, 1837, through the first few months of 1838; he had no editorial post, and his total known publication consisted only of the Stephens review and the first printing of two tales—“Von Jung” and “Siope” (written much earlier). Many years later William Gowans, who had lived with the family for some eight months, recalled that Poe “during this time” wrote his “longest prose romance, entitled the Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym”; but this vague recollection provides little aid. It is probable that Poe was spurred to return to his nautical narrative by a public controversy over delays in the South Seas exploring expedition, authorized by Congress in May, 1836. During the latter half of 1837 and early 1838, Reynolds—who had been championed by Poe—engaged in an acrimonious debate in New York newspapers with the Secretary of the Navy, Mahlon Dickerson, over plans for the voyage; their disagreement would cost Reynolds his own cherished post. Whether or not Poe’s interest in Reynolds’ position was the specific stimulus, he did begin in these chapters to turn his story line in a direction which clearly reflected Reynolds’ present concern with the commercial potential of southern waters. He now closed off the drifting sequence, removed Augustus and instated Peters as Pym’s companion, had the two survivors rescued by the Jane Guy, and initiated an account of a sealing and trading cruise which is drawn in almost verbatim detail from a new source—Captain Benjamin Morrell’s Narrative of Four Voyages (New York, 1832).

The main peculiarities of this stage are: (1) Chapter X opens with a reference by Pym to the “thousand chances which afterward befell me in nine long years” (p. 109), an indication that Poe projected an extended and consecutive narration of his adventures. (The date of the Grampus voyage, 1827, plus nine equals 1836, the date of Pym’s return home.) (2) Augustus, as we have noted, dies in Chapter XIII and vanishes from the plot as suddenly and completely as Tiger. (3) The fact that Pym is a teenager is forgotten as he is forced to play the role of a man in the cannibalism episode. He is far less subjective and no longer tells us of his dreams, though he gives us the gratuitous and unsupported information that he had “been in bad health” at the commencement of the voyage (p. 120). (4) Peters, too, has undergone metamorphosis; both his ferocious appearance and his “hybrid” makeup are never again alluded to. As the new comrade of Pym (contributing to the illusion that Pym is now an older man), he is given a tamer personality: “In subsequent perils . . . ,” Pym comments, “Peters, it will be seen, evinced a stoical philosophy” (p. 144). Actually, however, he is barely mentioned again until late in the Tsalal episodes and he displays no particular stoicism. (5) The rescue by the Jane Guy puts a sudden end to the voyage of the Grampus and, as Professor Cecil observes, there is little transition at this point. Yet if Pym were to survive at all he would have to be saved by being cast ashore or by being picked off the hulk by another ship, and the transition may be criticized as too abrupt only if we

20 Another oddity of this section is the possibility of a private joke in the names given two of their crew and their fates. One “Simms” falls overboard, “being very much in liquor,” and drowns (p. 76). And “Greely” has the misfortune of having his brains beaten out (p. 94). Poe had been annoyed that some believed William Gilmore Simms to be the editor of the Messenger; see the April, 1836, issue, in which White announced that Simms was not in charge, and also Poe’s letter addressed to a correspondent who had mistakenly written to Simms as the editor (Letters, I, 105–106). As for “Greely,” Horace Greeley had recently founded the New Yorker, a weekly devoted to literature, the arts, and the sciences. Were there jibes at rival editors? A further surprise in the proper names (not, however, confined to this stage) is that two men called Allen are brutally killed off (p. 86 and p. 206). Their given names, perhaps fortuitously, are William and Wilson.

assume with Professor Cecil that the Jane Guy at once begins the search for the South Pole. She does not; she cruises erratically from August 7 till December 12 (following the paths of various voyages of Captain Morrell), and there is no mention whatever of the pole until the first paragraph of Chapter XVI (which we believe begins the fourth stage).

Indeed, Chapters XIV and XV convey a quite different original concept of the Jane Guy’s mission. In Chapter XII (before his rescue) Pym pads the narrative with a long paragraph (drawn from Morrell) about the Galapago tortoise, assuring us there will be frequent occasion to mention it in “a subsequent portion of this narrative” (pp. 132–133). The few later references to tortoises hardly justify this much detail. Moreover, in Chapter XIV (after the rescue) he breaks the narrative to inform us (again in Morrell’s words) of the habits of the penguin and the albatross, once more underlining Poe’s intention by the unsubstantiated comment that he will “have occasion hereafter” to speak of them (p. 155). What such remarks appear to prepare us for is a log of a long South Seas cruise, possibly ending with the destruction of the vessel and the capture of the crew by hostile natives. The initial description of the Jane Guy, at any rate, suggests such a continuation. The last sentence of Chapter XIII tells us that she is bound “on a sealing and trading voyage”; Chapter XIV, which directly follows the rescue, begins with factual data about the ship’s unsuitability for such service. Captain Guy, who is next introduced, is said to be “invested with discretionary powers to cruise in the South Seas for any cargo which might come most readily to hand” (p. 149). Surprisingly, for a man who but two chapters later will push on for the South Pole, he is also said to be “deficient . . . in energy, and consequently, in that spirit of enterprise which is here so absolutely requisite” (pp. 148–149). He (or Poe) is certainly a somewhat desultory navigator. Having sailed from Liverpool, Captain Guy plans to make his first stoppage at Kerguelen’s Land, an island in the southern Indian Ocean. “I hardly know for what reason,” Pym muses. Actually, there is none, except for the fact that Poe was copying nearly all of the details of Chapters XIV and XV from Captain Morrell. Both these chapters are crammed with borrowed facts about previous voyages to these waters, having no bearing on what is to come later; and the latter chapter concludes with a fruitless quest for the mysterious Aurora Islands, which are said to be somewhere east of the southern tip of South America. This stage then trails off lamely with Pym’s notation that since his return he has found that others have traced the area with the same results—Poe at least has the grace to mention that Morrell was one of them. It is hard to resist the conclusion that at this point—wearied of copying from the real travels of others—he now again temporarily dropped his narration, waiting for some new controlling idea.

Stage IV: Chapter XVI to the end of the story (with the exception of Chapter XXIII and the “Note”). External events now gave Poe an opening, and this fourth stage may be linked with some certainty to the period between March and May, 1838. In March the bogged-down South Seas expedition was given new impetus with the appointment of Lieutenant Charles Wilkes as its commander. Like many others who had supported Reynolds—including one officer who declined the command—Poe was incensed that the prime mover was not to be given a berth. But at least the project now promised to become a fact; and public interest was excited by the probability of American discoveries, since its mission was now oriented toward scientific research and polar exploration. With Chapter XVI Poe’s narrative suddenly veers back to Reynolds’ earlier enthusiasm for an American conquest of the pole; he is mentioned by name as the man “whose great exertions and perseverance have at length succeeded in getting set on foot a national expedition, partly for the purpose of exploring these [polar] regions” (p. 167), and much of the succeeding historical detail is drawn directly from Reynolds’ 1836 address to Congress. This was a source which Poe had not used since the initial Messenger installments. (Morrell, who had cruised below the Antarctic Circle, is also quoted again.) From this point on until the completion of the book—probably in July, 1838—Poe was specifically bent on making his readers believe that a real Mr. Pym had already traversed these Antarctic regions a full decade earlier.

As we have pointed out, Chapter XVI opens with the abrupt and unexpected announcement of Captain Guy’s decision to give up his plan...
to cruise in the South Pacific and instead to “push on toward the pole”, it continues with a résumé of previous discoveries and closes with Pym for the first time directly referring to his own experiences in the remote south. The next chapter rapidly develops this plan, describing the Jane Guy’s progress with a strong current until the ship is below the eightieth parallel and all hands feel “certain of attaining the pole” (p. 175). At this juncture, however, the crew begins to sight startling objects, including the prow of a canoe, a red-eyed polar bear, and the carcass of a white animal with scarlet teeth and claws. By the second paragraph of Chapter XVIII the vessel has come upon the island of Tsalal—and has sailed over the edge of fact into the fantastic.

Why did Poe now interrupt the steady drive for the pole, when he has Pym himself remonstrate with Captain Guy for the delay at Tsalal? In the first place, the story was still too short to make a book; secondly, he no doubt understood that he never could precisely describe Pym’s exploration at or near the pole without risking exposure in the near future from the findings of the Wilkes expedition. This latter problem he now attempted to solve by suddenly shifting his readers’ attention to the strange events in Tsalal and by offhand assertions that Pym has solved the polar mystery, though that solution, of course, is never presented.

This fourth stage is at once the most fascinating and the most exasperating of the entire story. These are its notable features: (1) The Tsalal episode is complete in itself, and the quest for the pole becomes for the time being of secondary interest. (2) Tsalal has many of the characteristics of a South Seas island—an element which might have been suggested to Poe by Morrell’s comments about the increasing south. The next chapter rapidly develops this plan, describing the future from the findings of the Wilkes expedition. This latter problem for the first time directly referring to his own experiences in the Antarctic; and bibliographical evidence indicates they had actually begun setting the book in that month.21 But Poe was now caught in a

21 Bailey, in PMLA, LVII, 513-522, and again in the preface to a facsimile edition of Symzonia (Gainesville, Florida, 1965), argues that Poe drew directly from this pseudonymous book, which expounds Symmes’ theories and may have been written by Symmes himself. But nearly all the parallels which Bailey cites can also be found in Morrell, and it seems unlikely to us that he made use of this comparatively rare work, which had been published in 1820. However, Poe did certainly know of Symmes’ ideas, perhaps through Reynolds, who had espoused them in the late 1820’s.

22 Guy’s writing of Tsalal’s ruins and for the inscriptions is J. L. Stephens’ Arabia Petrea, in which the author refers to a rock at Sinai covered with writings which he could not read.

23 R. W. Griswold also overlooked this musing and it is repeated in the second edition of Pym, published in Works, IV (New York, 1856).

24 The sentence at the beginning of Paragraph Two of Chapter I definitely was added, since it does not appear in the Messenger text. A study of the context suggests these other important phrases were also inserted: “—a narrative, let me say here…” (p. 53); the last part of the first sentence of Chapter X.

25 In a facsimile of this leaf of the book is an advertisement dated May, 1838, listing Pym among works “just published.” This leaf is integral with signature [A] of the text—that is, it is not tipped in or bound into the book but was set up along with the opening pages of the story. Why, then, is the preface (which is included in this signature) dated “July, 1838”? Either it was purposely postdated to make the book appear hot off the press when it reached readers or (much more probably) the date was altered at the last moment before printing to make it conform to the delayed publication date of July 27.
dilemma: he had been trapped by the first-person method of narration which he had adopted at the beginning of the Messenger sections. For if he had Pym sail into the white cataract and disappear—the easiest way of avoiding the embarrassment of describing polar regions and of quickly ending the story—how could he explain the survival of the long manuscript? Resorting to the device employed in the early "MS. Found in a Bottle" was now clearly out of the question, since he had already brought Pym back to the United States. He could thus depend only on the power of an impressive final image—and on one last-minute attempt to distract readers' attention from the conclusion in which nothing is concluded.

Stage V: Chapter XXIII and the "Note"; July, 1838. Three facts point to these segments as a very late addition: (1) As indicated above, two chapters are numbered XXII and XXIII, an implication that an insertion was made between the original Chapters XXII and XXIII. (2) Only the first Chapter XXIII and the "Note" deal with the inscriptions; they are mentioned nowhere else in the text. (3) The "Note" (which begins on a separate leaf and is printed in footnote type) suggests that Pym's veracity "may shortly be verified or contradicted by means of the governmental expedition now preparing for the Southern Ocean." The Wilkes expedition was expected to leave in July, though it actually departed in mid-August. Moreover, taken together, these two segments offer a cryptogrammatic problem which draws the reader away from the abrupt end of the narrative.

The real puzzle here, however, is not the meaning of the inscriptions themselves but the patently hoaxing—even comic—tone of the "Note." In the first place, who is its presumed author? Though obviously it is the work of Poe, it refers both to Pym and to Poe in the third person and would therefore appear to be the contribution of an unnamed editor. What it tells us is even odder: (1) Pym is dead after all; he has lately lost his life in a sudden and distressing accident, as is "already well known to the public through the medium of the daily press." This casual reference to a set of nonexistent "facts" is a common trick of the hoaxter, but here it is naively transparent. For Pym has signed a dated July, 1838—the very month of the book's appearance—and his death would thus be a matter of immediate record. (2) The "two or three final chapters" which had been retained by Pym "while the above were in type" have been lost through the accident in which he perished. Yet the text covers less than one-ninth of the promised time span. How could only two or three chapters be sufficient to narrate all his further adventures, plus the revelation of "one of the most intensely exciting secrets" science has yet known? (3) Peters is said to be alive, in Illinois; if found he may be persuaded to furnish material for a conclusion. But this is the man whom Pym has slightingly referred to in his preface as a "half-breed Indian"—one whose word, presumably, is not to be trusted! (These last two points, incidentally, would seem warrant enough that Poe actually planned no sequel.) (4) Poe—author of the narrative as well as the "Note"—refers to himself as having declined the task of completion, at least partly because of his "disbelief in the entire truth of the latter portions of the narration." Furthermore, he (the inventor of them) has failed to decipher the inscriptions, though they are clear enough to the author of the "Note." Finally, (5) the "Note" (like the main body of the narrative) ends with a pseudo-biblical quotation full of impressive sound but signifying nothing. Pym thus comes to a lame anticlimax, in which the author himself invites us to doubt the seriousness of his conclusion. Poe had done his best to string out a still short manuscript and to bring his story to a halt; but the "Note" remains a curious, almost contemptuous, treatment of the credulity of the reader.

There is some evidence that the Harpers, though they duly went on to publish the book, were less than satisfied with Poe's performance. In 1844 Poe wrote to Professor Anthon asking him to try to persuade the Harpers to bring out an edition of his short tales. Anthon replied that he had seen them, but he reported that they have "complaints against you, grounded on certain movements of yours, when they acted as your publishers some years ago." Since the Harpers published only Pym for Poe it is more than likely that the comment refers to his dilatory conduct in 1837 or 1838. Certainly the book, a poor seller, had proved a disappointment all around.

Thus far we have presented the evidence for Poe's composition of Pym in several distinct stages. We may now properly inquire what light our findings may shed on interpretation of the story. These conclusions, we believe, are justified: (1) First and last Poe planned Pym as a hoax, though the purpose of his deception shifted. At the beginning he was concerned only in the creation of a verisimilar voyage narrative, in which the character of young Pym was to be as important as his adventures. In the later stages—having failed to finish his planned cruise before he came under the influence of renewed interest in Antarctic exploration—he tried to transmute his protagonist into an older and self-effacing reporter of incredible but actual discoveries. As a result, the book...
was thrown wildly off balance, and much of the earlier material was rendered irrelevant in terms of preparation for the final scenes. (2) The book has only a spurious unity, achieved by Poe's showmanship rather than by careful structuring. Even this effect is apt to work but once; any close scrutiny of the text exposes flaws which the critic cannot—
or should not—ignore. Professor Cecil's suggestion that the parts may be considered separately is an evasion. (3) More fundamentally, the story lacks a controlling theme and has no uncontrollable serious meaning—symbolic, psychoanalytic, existentialist, racist, or otherwise. The subtle readings of recent commentators—among them Patrick Quinn, Harry Levin, Leslie Fiedler, and Sidney Kaplan—depend upon emphasis on certain chosen elements at the expense of consideration of the whole text. No amount of straining can bring all of its disparate elements into a consistent interpretation. Poe himself, we may recall, later assessed Pym as a "very silly story," and though the remark ought to be considered in its context, the fact is that he never reprinted it. Perhaps the best critical judgment remains that of Henry James, who pronounced (in the preface to the Altar of the Dead) that its "imaginative effort [was] wasted." For what Pym finally offers us is not mystery but mystification, not a problem for serious explication but an unsolvable puzzle, not complexity of meaning but meaningless complication.

And yet, to offset these negative conclusions, we would also add that Pym remains of interest as a key to Poe's techniques of craftsmanship as well as to a study of his development as a writer. Most certainly its connection with his later insistence on unity of effect and on brevity in fiction deserves consideration. For just two years after Pym he once again attempted a long tale, the account of exploration in the American West called The Journal of Julius Rodman. Like Pym, Julius Rodman was broken off when Poe quarreled with the publisher of the magazine in which it was appearing serially; but he never came back to it, leaving one more hero stranded short of his objective. Henceforth he avoided altogether long serial narratives of life on the ocean and in the wilderness. Indeed, as his review in 1843 of Cooper's Wyandotte indicates, his view of the possibilities inherent in these two subjects had now become reasonably jaundiced. "A man of genius," he wrote, "will rarely, and should never, undertake either." 33

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35 See Letters, I, 130. Poe was writing to William E. Burton, whose Gentleman's Magazine had attacked Pym, assuring him that this review was not the cause of any "latent hostility" toward him.

36 Graham's Magazine, XXIII (November, 1843), 261.