**Organizations**


The PSA sponsored a second session, chaired by Roberta Sharp (California State Univ., Pomona) on the topic, “Poe and Race.” Speakers included Terence Whalen (Univ. of Illinois, Chicago Circle); Betsy Erkilla (Northwestern Univ.); John Carlos Rowe (Univ. of California, Irvine); and J. Gerald Kennedy (Louisiana State Univ.).

The Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore and the University of Baltimore have instituted the Alexander Rose Memorial Fund in Poe Studies. By early 1996 the fund had nearly reached its initial financial goal of $10,000 in gifts and pledges. The fund will support an annual lecturership in Poe Studies. Contributions, payable to the University of Baltimore Educational Foundation, may be sent to Carol Peirce, University of Baltimore, 1420 North Charles St., Baltimore, MD 21201. Contributors should earmark donations for the Rose Fund. Thomas Bonner (Xavier Univ.) will be the speaker at the Baltimore Poe Society’s annual lecture in October 1996.

The annual birthday celebration sponsored by the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum (Baltimore, January 1996) featured music, lectures, and theatrical presentations.

At Richmond’s annual Poe Festival in October 1995, Burton R. Pollin spoke on “Poe as Virtual Inventor and Practitioner of Science Fiction.” Actor David Keltz offered interpretations of “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Black Cat,” “The Cask of Amontillado,” and “The Raven.” The Poe Museum also sponsored an art show and a reading by novelist Stephen Marlowe. In February 1995, the Poe Museum sponsored “Poetic Justice,” a program commemorating Poe’s publication of “The Raven.” The event, held at Virginia Commonwealth University, featured readings by local poets.


The topics for PSA programs in 1996 are “Poe and the Detective Story” and “Poe and Popular Culture.” Direct inquiries to John Irwin (Johns Hopkins Univ.).

**Daniel Hoffman**

Daniel Hoffman entered the arena of academic publication with *The Poetry of Stephen Crane* (1957), an excellent study of what up to that time had remained an untouched variety of Crane’s output. *Form and Fable in American Fiction* (1961) occasioned great acclaim when it appeared, and it has remained “must” reading for anyone who wishes to establish serious claims to authority as regards our nation’s fiction. Other books, authored and edited, have followed—the latest being *Faulkner’s Country Matters* (1989), where Hoffman gave Faulkner the just dues he felt that the Southern author merited, and that had not constituted a sufficient part of Form and Fable—along with grants and honors of great distinction. When *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* was published in 1972, it was heralded as a controversial approach to Poe, although in intervening years the ideas set forth there have gained solid footholds in academic studies because the subtlety of Poe’s humor has been given greater credence. The book was an outgrowth of Dan’s seminars for graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania. Dan has tackled Poe on other grounds as well; he has lectured repeatedly on the man and his work, he furnished sensible response at a recent PSA meeting where Poe biography was the central topic, he is ever willing to assist anyone with queries concerning Poe, and he has remained a staunch supporter of the organization and its newsletter. Like Poe himself, moreover, Dan is both poet and critic. Who better, then, at this point in time, to take rank as an Honorary Member of the PSA?

Benjamin F. Fisher
Current Research and Publications


Jonathan Elmer’s Reading at the Social Limit: Affect, Mass Culture, and Edgar Allan Poe ($30.00, 259 pp.) has been published by Stanford University Press.


Burton R. Pollin delivered lectures on “Poe as Virtual Inventor and Practitioner of Modern Science Fiction” at the University of London, the University of Liverpool, the University of Manchester, the University of Nottingham, and the University of Norwich, the University of the Basque Country, and at the University of Santiago’s International Congress of North American Literature: Short Story in the fall of 1995. He also lectured on “The Artists Interpret Poe’s Work” at the University of Vigo.

David Hirsch (Brown Univ.) also spoke at the International Congress of the Short Story on “The End of the Concept of Western Man: Poe and Nietzsche.” Eusebio Llacrer Llorca (Univ. of Valencia) spoke on “The Revolution of Poe’s Narrative: ‘The Pit and the Pendulum,’” and Maria Jose Alvarez Faedo (Univ. of Oviedo) spoke on “The Tales of Edgar Allan Poe: A Study of His Creative Process.”


Brian Hale (Midlands Technical College) is working on Poe’s sentimental sources.

Randall A. Clack (Univ. of Connecticut) is working on a book-length manuscript entitled The Phoenix Rising: Alchemical Imagination in the Work of Edward Taylor, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Margaret Fuller.

Shawn Rosenheim (Williams College) is working on The King of Secret Readers: Edgar Allan Poe and the Cryptographic Imagination.


“Poe’s Greatest Hit” by Stephen Jay Gould, an essay originally published in Natural History, has been reprinted in his essay collection, Dinosaur in a Haystack (Harmony Books, 1995).
In his Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), T. O. Mabbott cited fifteen parodies of Poe’s “The Raven” published before 1850 (1: 352). Too late for inclusion in Mabbott’s list, Thomas L. Brasher published “A Whitman Parody of ‘The Raven’?” (Poe Newsletter 1 [1968]: 30-31); this parody, entitled “A Jig in Prose,” appeared in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle of January 11, 1848, at a time Walt Whitman was editing that paper. The likelihood that Whitman had a hand in the parody is much reduced by the appearance of an earlier verse printing, entitled “A Parody,” in the Philadelphia Dollar Newspaper on August 18, 1847. Other printings have been located: “A Jig in Prose” appeared in the New York True Sun on February 21, 1848, and Burton R. Pollin (American Periodicals 2 [1992]: 6) found printings in the Boston Olive Branch on April 20, 1850 (in verse form) and in the New Orleans Daily Crescent on June 11, 1850 (in prose). Though Whitman was connected with both the Daily Eagle and the Crescent, publication of the parody in these two periodicals appears to have been mere coincidence. Here is the first known printing from the Dollar Newspaper:

A Parody

Once upon an evening dreary, while I pondered, lone and weary,
Over many an olden paper, reading forgotten stories o’er,
Suddenly I heard a curious, lonely, ghostly, strange mysterious
Grating, underneath the floor!
’Tis some little mouse, I muttered, underneath the office floor!
Only this, and nothing more.

And again I trimmed the taper, and once more resumed my paper—
Aged, forsaken, antique paper—poring its ancient contents o’er,
When again I heard repeating this same strange, mysterious grating,
But much louder than before:
And it seemed like some one sawing wood beneath the office floor,
’Tis no mouse thought I, but more.

As I listened, each particular hair stood upright, perpendicular,
Cold, out-standing drops, orbicular my forehead covered o’er;
While a strange mysterious terror, filled my soul with fear and horror,
Such as ne’er I felt before.
Much I wondered what this curious grating meant beneath the floor;
Thus I sat and eyed the floor.

And thus watching, gazing, pond’ring, trembling, doubting, fearing, wond’ring,
Suddenly the wall was unavailing, as for Banquo’s ghost of yore;
And while gazing, much astounded, instantly therefrom there bounded
A huge Rat upon the floor!
Not the least obeisance made he, but a moment stopped and staid he,
Stopp’d and look’d, and nothing more.

And while gazing at each other, suddenly out sprang another,
Something grayer than the other, with the weight of years he bore,
Then with imprecations dire, high I raised my boot and higher,
And a step advancing nigher, whirl’d it swift across the floor;
But the little imps had scattered, and the door was bruised and batter’d;
That it hit, but nothing more!

A December 1995 episode of the NBC television series “Homicide: Life on the Street” dealt with a 10-year old murder in which the victim was buried alive inside the wall of an abandoned building. One scene took place in Baltimore’s Westminster Churchyard, where Poe is buried. The detective marshals knowledge of Poe to crack the case. The murderer (played by Kevin Conway), a Poe-obsessed poet and drug addict, recites “Dream-Land” before committing suicide by entombing himself inside a wall. With a thumping heart heard on the soundtrack, the one-hour drama contained obvious echoes of “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Cask of Amontillado,” and “The Black Cat.”

Actor John Astin (of “Addams Family” fame) has appeared in “Once Upon a Midnight,” a one-man show written by Paul Clemens and Ron Magid. The program was reviewed in the Des Moines Register in June 1995.

“Nevermore . . . the last days of E. A. Poe” is a theatrical puppet show based on Poe’s life and writing. Created by Donald Devet and Drew Allison, the Grey Seal Puppets presented this program in Baltimore in January 1996.

Jefferson Studio Theatre (Faber, VA) has produced “Dreams No Mortal Ever Dared . . . an evening with Edgar Allan Poe,” billed as “a mesmerizing trip into the demonic world of Poe,” the program interweaves poetry, tales, and humor.

Poe and other nineteenth-century authors figured in a symposium on “The Gothic” at Higgins Armory Museum (Worcester, MA) in March 1996.
Poe and Detection

As the progenitor of detective fiction Poe has received repeated attention. At times that notice appears in critical-historical books and articles, at others within some piece of crime fiction itself. 

Like so many of Poe’s own writings, such spotlighting of his place in the literature of detection often occurs as a terse allusion here, a quotation (to the point of some bit of writing from another hand) there. In the absence of one exhaustive work on the topic, I offer as preliminaries the following discoveries. These findings encompass a wide range of materials which, so far as I am aware, have either not previously appeared in any bibliography of Poe or, if they have, their inclusion of information concerning his works in terms of detective fiction has not highlighted such detection elements. Many of the items cited below are themselves pieces of detective fiction, and the repeated allusions to Poe the man or to his writings within such creative works pay respects to a renowned predecessor, on the one hand, and provide us with images of him among authors of crime fiction, on the other. Poe’s derivations from Gothic tradition are also repeatedly noted. All should hold out interest for Poe scholars. My procedure is to cite items in chronological order, under two headings, hoping thereby to furnish some idea of the varying notions of Poe and his work that have come down to us from last century. Part One includes items that in the main address issues of general interest or several of Poe’s works. Part Two includes titles in which specific works by Poe appear, with relevant items placed under alphabetically arranged sub-headings (by title) of Poe’s writings.

General Mention & Influence

“After Dark. By Wilkie Collins,” The Athenaeum, 1 March 1856, p. 260. Some Collins stories recall Poe’s; “there is a similarity of gifts between the two story-tellers, but in most of Edgar Poe’s tales there is either an extravagance, as though they had been written by a man on the verge of delirium tremens, or else a laboured monotony, as though his resources were beginning to run dry. The difference in the quality of character between the two men makes itself felt in their works, for it is the personal character that gives permanence to the works of genius.” WC’s stories, one excepted, previously in Household Words, “arranged like a collection of miniatures, in a single frame. The framework itself forms a graceful narrative, which imparts an air of reality to the stories, and gives them an interest they did not possess in their detached form.” “The Lost Letter” comparable to one of Poe’s stories of “minute induction from circumstantial evidence; the treatment is perfectly original and extremely amusing and spirited” [quotes from “The Yellow Mask” without references to Poe’s “Masque”].

“The Detection of Crime.” Saturday Review, 22 September 1860, pp. 353-354. News media wished that a “decipherer of riddles, like Mr. Edgar Poe, would present himself and put the world in possession of the secret [in the Road and Waterloo Bridge murder cases]. In fact, however, no such art exists. Of Poe’s two stories which are often quoted as illustrations of it, one is a mere invention, in which the same mind which invented the evidence invented the solution. If a man starts with the knowledge that an old woman’s throat was cut by a baboon, nothing is easier for him than to assert that some marvelously clever person, who knows nothing about it, discovered from the shape of the room, and from three hairs stuck in the crack of a door, that nothing but a baboon could have cut the old woman’s throat; but this is only playing chess with the right hand against the left. Yet the delusion that fiction produces is so complete, that this story, and the well-known fable about the wise man who was suspected of having stolen a camel because he gave a description of the beast and its load to the people who came to look for it (the principle which is precisely the same), are often referred to as illustrations of the force of circumstantial evidence. Poe’s other story illustrates another phase of the same delusion. In that case the facts really occurred, but that there was nothing except the assertion of Poe’s editor to show that there was any truth at all in the interpretation which he put upon them. An ingenious man may, no doubt, weave almost any facts into a possible theory, but it does not follow that it is a true one.


Sherlock Holmes rose and lit his pipe. “No doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin,” he observed. “Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. That trick of his of breaking in on his friends’ thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour’s silence is really very showy and superficial. He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine.”

Mable, Hamilton W. “Literary Aspects of America,” Ladies’ Home Journal, 12 (March 1895), 6. Poe admirable short-story writer; invents detective story. “The imaginative quality, the intellectual skill, the keen adaptations of means to ends, the subtility of insight, the management of dramatic effects—upon these qualities Dr. Doyle delights to dwell [in emphasizing] his own indebtedness to Poe and his recognition of Poe’s great abilities.”

Anon. “The Evil Guest,” Saturday Review, 27 April 1895, p. 557. Le Fanu’s horrors “tedious and quite inartistic” [reviewer’s idea, contrary to prevalent view]. To bracket him with Poe insults the latter. “Not a feeble scribbler can engender his bit of would-be weird story but some reviewer of books must drag Poe, more or less ingloriously, into the business.”

Anon. “Captain Shannon,” The Athenaeum, 5 June 1897, p. 743. Rev. Coulson Kernahan novel (Ward, Lock & Co., 1897). Novel treats “reminiscences from stories of Irish conspiracy, dynamite explosions, daring murders in Dublin and London, amateur detectives, and manifold disguises. It has no new ideas, and little that is new in incident; but as a budget of sensations, eked out with sixteen more or less striking pictures, it is interesting enough.” The plot “will probably amuse such as have acquired a taste for this sort of thing by much reading of Poe, Dr. Conan Doyle, Mr. Arthur Morrison, Mr. Muddock, and a dozen others.”

[Sanborn, Franklin B.]. “Books, Authors and Art,” Springfield Republican [Mass.], 8 September 1901, p. 15. Unnecessary to emphasize charges of Doyle’s plagiarizing from Poe. Doyle’s borrowings have been “liberal,” but the only “illegitimate” one is the unkind slur cast by Holmes on Dupin. Latter “must be held to be vastly more important than the copy, while in style and literary quality Dr. Doyle has, of course, no claim to rank with Poe.”

“Books and Bookmen,” Daily Mail [London], 1 June 1902, p. 3. Rev. Arthur Conan Doyle, The Hound of the Baskervilles (Newnes). Leads to consideration of detective “as the hero of a romance. The detective began to oust the Indian hunter and the pirate from the central place in the ‘penny dreadful’ about twenty years ago, and dozens of stories were written describ-
ing his daring and his cunning in tracking down evil-doers. ‘Hawkshaw, the Detective,’ was perhaps the most famous figure in England, while in America a ‘sleuthhound,’ called ‘Bates, the Boy Detective,’ had an immense vogue...Far removed from these creations of the Grub-street writer are, of course, the heroes of Gaboriau, Edgar Allan Poe, and Dr. Doyle. Poe’s Dupin, the hero of ‘The Murders of [sic] the Rue Morgue,’ was the first of the psychological detectives, and he has more than a little resemblance in his methods to Sherlock Holmes.”

Finnener, Richard. “The Unmasking of Sherlock Holmes,” *Criti*: 46 (February 1905), 115-117. Parodies Holmes stories. Watson records meeting of Dupin and Holmes, who pales and stammers that he supposed Dupin was dead. Dupin retorts that Holmes, too, had been reported dead, and that he himself, a creation of Poe—who was fond of bringing persons out of their graves—need not be censured for appearing. Holmes’s condescending comments regarding Poe’s works cause Dupin to retort that Poe wisely ceased writing Dupin stories in order to maintain the high artistry he had attained in “Murders” and “The Purloined Letter,” and Holmes admits that his own methods have been overworked. Dupin accuses Holmes of plagiarizing continually from Poe’s works, citing the derivation of “Adventure of the Dancing Men” from “The Gold-Bug” (which, although it is no Dupin story, serves as additional evidence of Poe’s not overworking his techniques).

Chesterton, Cecil. “Art and the Detective.” *Temple Bar*, 139 (October 1906), 322-333. Detective fiction suffers disapprobation as inferior art. Poe had perhaps less “ingenuity than Gaboriau, and certainly less power of creative characterization than [Wilkie] Collins.” Also small output, “and his fiction like his poetry is all splendid fragments,—reminders of what he might have done but for the curse of Reuben that lay always upon him. Unlike the other two, he was a poet and a man of abstract thought; conception of “The Purloined Letter” surpasses “reach of any other writer of the kind. And Dupin is more than a great detective, he is a great rationalistic philosopher, the incarnation of the logical and scientific conception of life.”

Anon. “German Detective Methods,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 11 March 1916, pp. 20-21, 69-70. “Monseur Dupin, Poe’s famous detective, or his echo, Sherlock Holmes, suggested in one of his deductive reflections that if ever he should have a little leisure he would prepare a brochure on ash. He intended to impress the reader with a method of criminal investigation of an incredible minuteness.”


Doyle, Arthur Conan. *Memories and Adventures*. London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d. [1924, 1925]. pp. 74-75. Influenced by Henry James, Doyle had published several stories in the Cornhill. “I felt now that I was capable of something fresher and crisper and more workmanlike. Gaboriau had rather attracted me by the neat dovetailing of his plots, and Poe’s masterful detective, M. Dupin, had from boyhood been one of my heroes. But could I bring an addition of my own? I thought of my old teacher, Joe Bell, of his eagle face, of his curious ways, of his eerie trick of spotting details. If he were a detective he would surely reduce this fascinating unorganized business to something nearer to an exact science. I would try if I could get this effect.” Thus was Sherlock Holmes born. James Payn found *A Study in Scarlet* unsuitable in terms of length. Arrowsmith also rejected. Finally, “as Ward, Lock & Co. made a specialty of cheap and often sensational literature, I sent it to them.” Appeared as *Beeton’s Christmas Annual* for 1887.


Wrong, E. M. ed. *Crime and Detection* London et al.: Oxford UP, 1926. In the “Preface” and “Introduction” Wrong notes, first, omission of American stories from this collection because, save for Poe, of editorial ignorance of the subject matter. Poe is placed as creator of the detective story in which a less mentally endowed friend of the sleuth chronicles that worthy’s achievements. Poe’s accomplishments are minimized to enrich the creation of Sherlock Holmes. [Comment that murder occurred in just one Dupin tale (p. xix) could be debated: cf. “Murders” and “Marie Roget”].

Sayers, Dorothy L. *Strong Poison*. NY: Harper and Row, 1930; rpt. NY: Avon Books, 1967, Ch. 7, p. 73. “I merely proceed on the old Sherlock Holmes basis, that when you have eliminated the impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be true” [spoken by Marriott]. Whimsey responds: “Dupin said that before Sherlock” [as if Sayers wishes to rectify Holmes’s put-down in *A Study in Scarlet*].

Horler, Sydney. *The False Purple*. NY: The Mystery League, 1932. Ch. entitled “Another Surprise for the Doctor” [no ch. numbers], p. 251. Fashionable young Doctor Bernadou poisoned patients and then “disposed of the corpses in a manner that might have come out of the pages of one of Edgar Allan Poe’s grimiest stories.” Interestingly, much of this novel set in Paris, has another character, Mrs. Courtney de-Lance Holmes; newspaper accounts of various happenings highlighted—suggestive of Dupin tales and detective fiction by other early practitioners.

Wells, Carolyn, ed. *The Best American Mystery Stories of the Year*. NY: John Day, [1932], pp. vii-xviii. Dupin operates on deductive analysis. Poe first to write detective story as we know it, although he never used the word. Sherlock Holmes “Dupin redivivus, and mutatus mutandis.” Poe’s writing that Dupin was spurred by “an excited or perhaps a diseased intelligence” may be self-revelatory. Poe probably felt that interest in his Dupin stories lay in reader’s curiosity in “following the successive steps of reasoning by which the crime was ferreted out.”

Poe and Detection
Continued from page 5

nological list up to Nero Wolfe. "Now try to invent a detective whose personal idiosyncrasies (the formula says they are necessary) are unique without being a fraud, a sleuth whose manner of deduction is original and fresh."


Anthony, Wilder. Deep Valley. Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1940, pp. 68, 75. Dr. Norton, the coronor, mentions Poe and Gaboriau as parts of his reading. Some of their methods may be used in real-life deduction. "All after all, it is the matter-of-fact, commonplace things which are most often overlooked by the investigator" (p. 68). Missing will turns up, but not securities or box of gold. Norton remarks "Poe himself could not have invented a situation more grotesque" (p. 75). [One wonders, since murder victim, old Abner Marsh, so much resembles the gorillas he had hunted years earlier, and since there's a stuffed gorilla in his room, whether Poe's "Murders" may have contributed to this locked-room story].


Reynolds, Quentin. The Fiction Factory, or From Pulp Row to Quality Street. NY: Random House, 1955, pp. 55, 177-178. "Murders" first detective short story; "sired the Nick Carters, the Charlie Chans, the Sherlock Holmeses, the Sam Spades, and the hundreds of sleuths who followed." Cites Anthony Boucher's statement that Poe's five tales of "deductive analysis" presented all the "standard elements" of detective fiction (even today's). Although Edgar Wallace probably didn't read Poe beforehand, he had instinctive sense of these elements.


1975, pp. 11, 13-17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 35, 66. Poe anticipated, many think, in creating detective story; Barnes finds only Godwin's Caleb Williams (1794) and Vidocq's Memoirs (1827-29) germane. Lists Poe's contributions to detective fiction and several examples of his influence, e.g., on Gaboriau, Futrelle, Van Dine, Doyle (acknowledged in Memories and Adventures [1924]), Leroux, Carr, Chesterton, Freeman, Christie. Poe inspired little immediate influence in America, but had impact in Britain, France. Melville Davison Post's Uncle Abner stories thought by some to be the best since Poe. Few outstanding creators of detective short stories although Poe created this form.

Feinman, Jeffrey. The Mysterious World of Agatha Christie. NY: Award Books, 1975, pp. 112, 131-132, 136-137, 139-140, 145. Christie's sleuths seem likely to outlive those of Doyle, Poe. Poe originated modern detective fiction ("Murders" features first real detective in fiction); there's seriousness ("literacy, intellectual curiosity, and scientific inquiry") surrounding its creation; Christie's appeal cerebral, like that of Doyle, Poe.


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Editor's Note: "Poe and Detection" will conclude in the next issue of the newsletter.

Review


Billed on the dust jacket as "a reader's companion," J. Gerald Kennedy's newest contribution to Poe studies offers a literary and historical context for The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, as well as a reading of Poe's novel. With a useful chronology of Poe's life and a selected bibliography, this book in Twayne's Masterwork Studies series grants a wide readership access to the ongoing dialogue about Pym, a work notoriously resistant to interpretation.

Kennedy situates Pym in the turbid United States of the 1830s—a nation smoldering over issues of property, Native Americans, and abolition, while indulging in the mad rush of westward expansion. He suggests how, against a backdrop of turmoil, American authors "began to forge significant careers" (8). Poe's Pym, according to Kennedy, "exploits contemporary aspirations and anxieties as it depicts a fantastic voyage culminating in death and revelation somewhere near the South Pole" (9). This journey is the source of critical controversy.

Kennedy says that Pym "calls into question the understanding that his narrator supposedly acquires, leaving in doubt the possibility of education in a world of ubiquitous illusion. The final, ambiguous episode...betrays authorial mystification as Poe leaves his reader literally hanging on the edge of an interpretive abyss" (12). Compounding the difficulty is "Poe's hostility toward the popular audience that he was forced to placate" (14). While scholars sense "his deeper, ironic purposes" (32), Poe has conjured a novel which "does not permit itself to be read" (72).

Pym's unreadability has triggered an avalanche of essays, and Kennedy summarizes key discoveries. Some of Richard Kopley's correctives for Kennedy's edition of Pym (1994) apply here (PSA Newsletter 23 [1995]: 6-7)—notably, plausible glosses, which Kennedy omits, for such Tsalalian expressions as "Tekeliii!" "Pym and the Abyss of Interpretation," however, is a guide, not a comprehensive treatment of criticism. For his purposes, Kennedy's compendium is ample. He classifies responses to Pym as (a) those finding "a significant journey toward spirituality, rebirth, and authentic selfhood" or (b) those regarding Pym as "a blind movement toward an abyss of meaningless" (40). Certain analyses bridge both categories, while others do not fit either one; nevertheless, Kennedy provides a useful classification of divergent theories.

Two-thirds of Kennedy's book is devoted to a reading of Pym. In the novel's preface, he finds "treacherous paragraphs" and Poe's "unmitigated contempt for the fools he must appease" (34-35). He calls Pym "a text that seems to defy or subvert all efforts to devise a plausible, coherent reading" (40); nevertheless, he identifies "the loss of romantic illusions through initiation into the deception, violence, and cruelty of human society" (51) while admitting that Pym's "continuing self-deception" undercuts his theme. Kennedy finds the later Pym more "informed, perceptive, and resolute" (56). Oddly, this wiser Pym fails to discern even the most obvious duplicities of Tsalal. Kennedy implies that Poe satirize is an indictment of racism (61-62).

After the Tsalalian burlesque, Poe found himself in a predicament arising "from imaginative exhaustion as much from geographic extremity" (65). Considering the ending rushed, Kennedy states that the gigantic, white, human figure has "provoked more critical disagreement than any other brief passage in Poe's writings" (70). He isolates three theories of the figure's meaning: naturalistic; mythic or spiritual; and skeptical or deconstructive (71). Pym "allows us to see the limits of our own knowing as an unspoken source of apprehension and suggests that we generate interpretation in some sense as a defensive reaction" (73). Assessing the editorial note, Kennedy states, "Poe embodied the predicament of modernity in his alternatively despairing materialism and desperate spirituality. This defining ambivalence frames the crisis of interpretation" (83).

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym and the Abyss of Interpretation is an effective guide to Poe's perplexing novel and the chaos of criticism it has inspired. The book benefits from its clear sense of purpose, to provide "a lively critical reading of a single classic text."

Robert Rhode
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