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This rousing sea adventure follows a New England boy, Pym, who stows away on a whaling ship with its captain's son, Augustus. The two boys, who find themselves repeatedly on the brink of discovery or death, witness many hair-raising events, including mutiny, savagery, cannibalism, and frantic pursuits.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket Details

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guess what? more horrifying things occur. Arthur Gordon Pym is, above all things, a bonafide dumbass.

this was an interesting experience. the past month was a busy time for me, so I pretty much just read this in 20 minute installments. it was maybe the best way to read it. it is a dry book but not an impenetrable one. fairly easy going down, in its own austere way. the horrors occur so regularly that it was rather nice taking a break after each new disaster. and Poe includes many lengthy discussions and explorations of fairly technical topics - things like proper and improper methods of stowage on a whaling ship - that he apparently took verbatim from other texts of the time period. that could have been tedious if I had decided to read this over the course of a few sittings, but spread out over a longer period of time, it actually was pretty interesting. so I knew that each time I cracked open this book, I was sure to get both an atrocity and a bit of education.

a word about the ending: it is just the kind of abrupt and entirely ambiguous ending that pleases me to no end. the sea changing color and turning viscous, the wall of mist, birds fleeing from *something*, an eerie white figure in the distance... and then full stop. no questions answered. it was like I was reading a sea journey written by Joseph Conrad and then all of a sudden the author remembered he was Edgar Allan Poe.

Marcello S says

A questo punto avremmo invero dovuto provare un certo allarme, a vedere la piega che prendevano gli eventi, mentre invece non ne avvertivamo neppur l'ombra.

Ultimo GDL della stagione. Riprendo in mano Poe che non leggevo dai primi anni dell'Università, quando cercavo di darmi un tono.

(Pro) Be', non manca niente di quello che si vorrebbe trovare in un racconto marinaro dell'800: claustrofobia, ammutinamenti, fame, cannibalismo, squali, esplorazioni. Le parti allucinate e visionarie sono il suo marchio di fabbrica.

Il finale, poi, è una superba catarsi verso l'infinito e oltre.

(Contro) Alcune scene un po' diluite per rendere l'aspetto temporale e la carica ossessiva. Ma soprattutto i termini tecnici, i continui riferimenti spaziali, il resoconto delle varie spedizioni verso Sud. Avrei voluto dirgli "non perderti via, resta sul fatto". Credo che queste parti siano dovute agli interessi dei lettori dell'epoca, ora mi sembrano solo abbastanza noiose e spezza-ritmo. Inoltre la pubblicazione del romanzo in singole parti su riviste lo ha reso discontinuo e (non positivamente) vario.

Per me se la cava meglio col racconto, e credo lo avesse capito pure lui. [70/100]

Fernando says

En este libro, su única novela, Poe intentó volcar absolutamente todos sus conocimientos y recursos literarios pero falló. El libro, tal vez por su extensión, no logra mantener el suspense de sus cuentos, más allá de las vicisitudes a las que está sometido el narrador.

El mismo Poe nunca quedó conforme con el resultado final. Será por eso tal vez que siempre se focalizó en escribir cuentos. De todos modos, el libro suscitó el interés de dos grandes de la literatura: Julio Verne, quien dijo que "alguien debía terminar la historia comenzada por Poe".

Fue justamente Verne quien intentó continuar la historia de Pym en el libro "La Esfinge de los Hielos". El otro que escribió una historia en homenaje a este libro (porque además consideraba a Poe uno de sus favoritos), fue H. P. Lovecraft con "En las Montañas de la Locura".

A veces, un autor cree que algo en su creación no funcionó, pero, por alguna razón, se transforma en el modelo de otros que le suceden y ese es uno de los misterios más maravillosos de la literatura...

Shawn says

As I'm due for a massive Poe re-read sometime in the next 2 years or so, I figured I'd at least polish off the one Poe work (outside of essays and a lot of his poetry) which I've never read. As usual, I tend not to do in-depth reviews for classics (as I feel more could be gained from reading experts' thoughts on the work) but, on the other hand, I will probably stick with my three-tiered review system, for those who haven't read the book or who aren't interested in some in-depth commentary.

TIER ONE REVIEW

This book, Poe's only novel, is something like a sea-adventure in the mold of classics like Treasure Island or Moby-Dick or, The Whale - but, that is, a sea-adventure written by a man notorious for his melancholia, alcoholism, and his fascination with the grotesque, lurid and macabre. It is also notorious for having an "unsatisfying" ending - as the narrative builds to a heightened pitch, and then breaks off. But I didn't find that to be much of a problem.

Who would enjoy reading this? Fans of classic sea-adventures might enjoy this very morbid take on the same, dealing as it does with some of the worst extremes one can encounter at sea. Poe fans should check it out as well, and general horror fans who have a taste for 19th Century writing styles should give it a try. The average reader? Hard to say, the ending may make your average reader feel as if they have been put through a ringer for the sake of nothing, or a monstrous joke.

TIER TWO REVIEW

I honestly enjoyed reading this. Full of extremes of anguish, deprivation and terror, and with an unexpected detour near the end into what can only be classed an early example of a "lost world" narrative, ARTHUR GORDON PYM, while episodic, is bracing and involving, exhausting and intriguing. The litany of harrowing events that turn ever darker may be familiar to a Poe reader, but also here are the occasional philosophical/psychological flashes that make Poe so interesting to the modern reader. You also get quite a bit of odd nautical lore/knowledge (how cargo is packed to reduce shifting, how Galapagos Turtles are thrown into holds of ships as an emergency source of food or water, the "lost" islands of the Auroras, etc.) and an ending that....well, you have to experience it yourself. Worth your time if you're a horror fan or just want to read something about 19th Century sailing that is thoroughly atypical from the norm.

THIRD TIER REVIEW (some general spoilers)

Arthur Gordon Pym relates to us his harrowing adventures at sea and at the south pole, culminating in an unresolved mystery. That he begins the tale describing a youthful misadventure in which a friend cajoles Pym into a high-spirited, late-night pleasure cruise on a small craft, only for the friend to eventually reveal himself to be so drunk that he passes out as they careen through the windy night towards certain death in a nautical collision - well, that's pure Poe. For as Pym points out, he SHOULD have come out of that youthful event with a fear of ships and the sea, but instead found that the worst aspects of the experience faded with time, while the perverse excitement of the exercise stayed with him as a fascination. And so, he contrives to go to sea! That "imp of the perverse" aspect, common to Poe, appears here in a few more forms, but the

involvement of alcohol in the initial event is worth noting. So, Pym has his friend smuggle him aboard a cargo vessel, secreted in a interstitial space below deck, to be brought above when the vehicle has advanced so far as to make returning him too much of a bother.

As I said above, the book is episodic, and this experience in the hold, with only a small amount of food and water, makes up a good portion of the start. As events progress, you will be treated to bloodthirsty mutiny, ravaging storms, deprivation when marooned at sea, the "awful choice" of men starving and dehydrated, and then even further, an exploration into the (then) mysterious and uncharted Antarctic seas, which reveal a strange land (oddly peopled), and then an even further journey south, seemingly beyond the actual world itself!

What impresses about all this is how Poe's traditional concerns and obsessions arise again and again. That "imp of the perverse" returns during a cliff-climbing sequence near the book's climax, as Pym is overcome with vertigo and an unstoppable urge for self-destruction. Classic Poe scenarios are envisioned in new forms - Pym might as well be "buried alive" in the hold of the ship, fevered and forgotten in pitch darkness, groping through a maze of small passages as he passes from dream to waking and back again during his immurement. The "return of the dead" is evident in a marvelous sequence in which, to distract mutineers, Pym adopts the disguise of a rotting corpse to appear vengefully and unexpectedly in their midst. The vast natural force of the sea (as in "The Descent Into The Maelstrom") here punishes Pym and his beleaguered compatriots. And, as in "Ms. Found In A Bottle", the sea-voyage itself becomes a metaphysical enterprise to push back the boundaries of human knowledge and understanding, into shadowy, symbolic realms...

Atypical for Poe is the section set in "Tslal" (Thomas Ligotti fans should hear a bell strike), an unknown country at the bottom of the world, which is both a combination of straight ahead adventure (which brought to mind some of *The Boats of the Glen Carrig*) and proto-science-fiction (peopled with seemingly benign savages, the land also seems to exhibit odd quirks in physics, with weird water and strange monsters). In truth, in this section one can feel Poe kind of stretching out of his usual environs of writing (whether successfully or unsuccessfully is up to the reader).

The fact that the vast wastelands and dangers of ocean travel allow Poe to exercise his tendencies towards morbidity by creating awful (but realistically plausible) scenarios of violence and deprivation (there's a lot of "survival horror" here, full of anguish and hopelessness) is also kind of interesting - Poe exercises a fascination with the fears allied with sea-travel known from classical narratives and culture (mutiny, "Raft of the Medusa", plague ship scenarios), with a feeling of the isolation of the ocean serving as a kind of "blank canvas" on which amoral acts and awful, unfair events can transpire under the eye of God. I even saw echoes of the "exploring the underwater planetarium" bits from J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*, in the sequence where the men on the floundering ship blindly dive into the flooded storerooms to rescue food and drink. One of the best sequences - (view spoiler) - is so monstrously morbid and dark I was shocked by its effectiveness. Similarly, the sequence (view spoiler) is grueling in its psychological insight and terror.

The major flaw of the book (setting aside the controversy of the ambiguous ending) lies in its episodic quality - as I said above, events keep getting worse up to a certain point, but when they are resolved, it feels as if Poe has just tired of the direction the narrative was going and so "set course" somewhere else, with very little effect shown on the characters who suffered these events, or reflection upon them (and some of these events would no doubt have driven men mad or scarred them for life). The narrative goes from being subjective (Pym trapped in his coffin-like box in the hold, delirious, emerges above deck into a larger world of danger, violence and action. But the ship itself becomes a kind of coffin for a time) to objective (focusing more on action and description) and one feels the thread is somewhat lost. But not entirely - and it is to Poe's credit that he steers the narrative to strange new directions, even if the navigation is a bit clumsy.

And then there's the phantasmagorical ending. Initially, I found it as jarringly abrupt as all previous readers (although I was lucky enough to know it was coming), but on some reflection I grew to enjoy its evocative, ominous mystery (hot milky white water, numbness and lassitude) even though it is kind of a cheat. (view spoiler). There have been sequels and parallel works written attempting to address this "lack" in the narrative - *Le Sphinx des glaces* by Jules Verne, *A Strange Discovery* by Charles Romyn Dake, **Conquête de l'Eternal** by Dominique Andre, *Last Call* by Harry Mulisch, *The Hollow Earth: The Narrative of Mason Algiers Reynolds of Virginia* by Rudy Rucker - but I find it more effective that no answer is ever given. The racial aspects and symbolism and of "Tslal" and the ending have been commented on by Toni Morrison (in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*) and in Mat Johnson's novel *Pym*.

So, a fine, interesting read! Those looking for a related laugh may enjoy this scene with Harold Ramis from an early episode of SCTV. Ramis is here playing Moe Green, the station manager and all-around cheapskate, who has contrived a contest for the Late Show that hopefully can never be won by the listeners. Starts at 22:00! DIALING FOR DOLLARS' impossibly unlikely winning question

Brian says

Shipwrecks! Cannibalism! Wiley natives!

This is a quintessential ripping yarn, a page turner of the most classic kind - a book that inspired Melville and caused Auden to gush. It's Poe's only novel, and perhaps given his master of the short form it's best that he only gave us one to savor. And that ending! I wish I hadn't read the appendix; the end to the main narrative was so shocking and unexpected, so good.

Yes, yes, there are those long passages about rookeries and longitudinal markings, but don't skim those beauties. Poe writes in such precise language; the reader comes away from each sentence with the impression that the brush strokes couldn't be improved.

I'm reading Poe as a prelude to reading Arno Schmidt's "Bottom's Dream" and I'm very happy that it led me to finally reading something I've always meant to get to.

Sandy says

In his short story entitled "Ms. Found in a Bottle" (1833), author Edgar Allan Poe told a tale of shipwreck on the high seas, following the mother of all storms. Along with one other survivor, our narrator drifts helplessly on the surface of the water, later encountering what seems to be a ghost ship, on which he climbs aboard, only to be swept toward the south polar regions and to an unknown fate. Flash forward five years, and Poe has now enlarged on some of this story's set pieces and themes, and turned them into the long-form work known as "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket." Although Poe would ultimately write 50 poems (Poe-ems?), 68 short stories, and reams of literary criticism before his premature death at age 40, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket" was his only novel. Its first few chapters initially appeared in "The Southern Literary Messenger," the Richmond, Virginia publication where Poe worked as editor; the novel itself first appeared in 1838, sans Poe's name on the title page, and when the budding author was only 29. Poe's one and only novel did not do well and was critically ill received, but today, going on 200 years later, its classic reputation rests very solidly indeed. The book, apparently, was not only an inspiration

for Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick" (1851), but also for Jules Verne, who was moved to write a sequel, and for H.P. Lovecraft, whose "At the Mountains of Madness" (1936) is clearly indebted to Poe's work here. My main reason for reading Poe's novel at this time, however, other than its classic and influential status, is the fact that it has been chosen for inclusion in Cawthorn & Moorcock's excellent overview volume "Fantasy: The 100 Best Books," a reference work that I tend to use as a reading syllabus/checklist. And I'm so glad that I did!

As would be expected, the book takes the form of an extended narrative of a Nantucket schoolboy named Pym, who tells us here of the adventures he had subsequent to stowing away on the whaler *Grampus*. His best friend Augustus Barnard, whose father was the ship's captain, smuggled him on board, and hid him in the cargo hold belowdecks, where poor Pym was trapped within pitch darkness for two weeks, and with scanty food and water, foul air, and his increasingly deranged dog, Tiger. But Pym's lot only became worse after being freed from the hold. The *Grampus* had been taken over by a band of cutthroat mutineers, who had either killed or put overboard the entire ship's complement! Pym, Augustus, Tiger, and the diminutive but Herculean Indian half-breed Dirk Peters managed to eliminate the mutineers, only to face days of hurricane-force winds, weeks of thirst and starvation, the imminent threat of hungry sharks, the necessity of cannibalism, the capsizing of the *Grampus*, and then still more days at sea. Truly, a harrowing, horrendous ocean voyage for young Pym, although all firmly in the realm of the credible, with no fantasy elements whatsoever. It is only when Pym and Peters, the sole survivors, are rescued at sea by the schooner *Jane Guy* that Poe's novel/Pym's story veers off into the fantastic. The *Jane Guy*'s crew, apparently, soon decided to explore the regions near and below the Antarctic Circle, only to have discovered strange forms of flora and fauna, and an island filled with a seemingly friendly clan of black people: black skin, black clothes, even black teeth. But that surface amiability on the part of the natives of the island of Tsalal was very short lived, indeed....

When "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket" was initially released, without Poe's name attached to it, the book fooled many readers into the belief that the events described had actually happened to the young author Pym, and it is easy to see why. Poe invests so much detail and so many verifiable facts into his book that even the most skeptical of readers might find his/her incredulity being (like the *Grampus* itself) swept away. Poe, thus, regales us with travelogue bits (for example, the history of the Kerguelen Islands in the south Indian Ocean), gives us some natural history information (everything you'll likely ever need to know about the nesting habits of the albatross, for example), provides precise compass readings of every obscure island visited (in case you ever decide to seek out the legendary Aurora Islands), tells us the complete history of south polar exploration (Captain Cook, James Weddell, Benjamin Morrell, etc.), and explains the precise method for preparing and preserving sea cucumbers. To further add authenticity, former Army sergeant-major Poe demonstrates an impressive knowledge of seamanship, including lengthy passages on the correct way to store cargo and how to "lay-to" the wind. Amusingly, Cawthorn & Moorcock refer to these stretches of factual exposition as "occasional Sargassoes," but somehow, this reader found it all pretty fascinating stuff (although I did find an unabridged dictionary and an atlas to be of invaluable assistance as I made my way through them).

Ultimately, though, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket" does justify its claim to be included in the fantasy pantheon. Once in the Antarctic, those fantastic elements include the 3-foot-long, 6-inch-high, white-furred, scarlet-toothed (!) animal that the *Jane Guy* crew discovers; the black tribe on Tsalal; the oversized scorpions and reptiles (!!!) found near the South Pole; and the mysterious, multihued water that is met with on the natives' island. Elements of horror are also to be found here in abundance, including Pym's truly harrowing experience aboard the *Grampus* (belowdecks, with the mutineers, when facing storm and sharks and starvation), and most especially the scene in which lots are drawn to determine who will be sacrificed as a cannibal dinner for the others. In perhaps the book's most memorable scene, however, the

Grampus encounters a Dutch ship of the literal dead (a Flying Dutchman reference?); not a ship comprised of ghosts, as in the 1833 short story, but rather, a ship filled with nothing but putrescent corpses, one of whom gives the semblance of a bow's figurehead from hell. For me, this book was both compelling and unputdownable; when I rush home from a day of proofreading and copyediting at work, yet still looking forward to picking up a book where I had left off the previous evening, that is a sure sign, indeed, of a grippingly well-told work.

Having said that, though, I will confess that Poe's novel did present me with some problems. For one thing, the author seems to get some of his facts wrong on occasion. He tells us that the (real-life) brig Polly had been lost at sea from December 15th to June 20th, for a total of 191 days; shouldn't that be 188 days? He goes on and on describing the cohabitation proclivities of the albatross and penguin, yet later tells us that this co-nesting is a habit of the albatross and...the pelican? He tells us that Capt. Barnard was "in the employ of Lloyd and Vredenburgh," yet later, when a character named Vredenburgh falls overboard from the Jane Guy, nothing is made of the (what I'm guessing is a) coincidence. Perhaps worse is the fact that the fates of two of the characters, Tiger and Capt. Barnard, are left up in the air: Capt. Barnard is put into a rowboat by the mutineers, his ultimate fate not vouchsafed by the author, while the Newfoundland dog is simply written out of the story following his valiant fight with the mutineers. Was he lost at sea during the ensuing hurricane? Poe never deigns to tell us. And perhaps even worse is the egregious internal inconsistency regarding Augustus. Pym tells us of a tidbit that Augustus told him many years later...but how could this possibly have happened, since Augustus does not survive the Grampus ordeal?!?! And on a personal note, this reader could never properly envision the ravines, pits and gorges that Pym and Peters explore on Tsalal. As if in recognition of this potential problem for his readers, Poe supplies us with five explanatory diagrams, which help not a whit, and only served to confuse me more.

Finally, as is generally known, "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket" ends in a cliffhanger fashion, with Pym and Peters on the brink of discovering something momentous near the South Pole. This fact did not bother me; I actually liked the book ending with a sense of the cosmic unknowable, as in the William Hope Hodgson classic "The House on the Borderland" (1908). What did bother me is the fact that Pym supposedly makes it back to civilization (where his foreword was written) and then suddenly died; so why couldn't "editor" Poe tell us what happened to him? It is all very strange, the cumulative effect being one of a very singular and mysterious experience, indeed. No wonder that Frenchman Jules Verne felt the necessity, in 1897, of trying to riddle out some of the story's manifold mysteries, in his 44th novel, "An Antarctic Mystery" (aka "The Sphinx of the Ice-Fields"). I am now going to have to get my hands on this Verne title one day. The conundrum of those Tsalalian hieroglyphics is, for me, just too much to ignore....

(By the way, this review originally appeared on the FanLit website at <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/> ... a most ideal destination for all fans of Edgar Allan Poe....)

Edward Lorn says

Some authors were never meant to be novelists. Some authors are meant to write short stories and some authors are poets.

In *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, Poe's (thankfully) only full-length novel, we witness the struggles of an author looking to branch out into long form and having no fucking clue what he is doing. You can see a beautifully-wretched and bleak novelette or novella in here, but Poe overstays his welcome by about 50 pages.

Even Poe considered this novel "silly". You have people on Goodreads touting this pile of shit as "SUPERB!" and "A MASTERSTROKE!" when literary scholars have agreed that they're not even sure what the fuck Poe was talking about half the time. Sorry, Weekend Lit Majors, I gotta go with the scholars on this one. It's a book of madfuck ramblings and stolen navigation notes Poe cribbed from Jeremiah N. Reynolds' many explorations. And you can tell when these stolen sections come into play because Poe's prose dials down and we're left reading paragraph after paragraph of nautical speak and goddamn coordinates. Anyone who gives this meandering and overlong novella more than three stars needs their heads checked. I doth believe they've skipped a cog and hath traveled down the path of the dodo. At the very least, they lack research skills.

Much like Mr. Pym, Poe is lost at sea here. The book was originally written in serial form, but was then discontinued, unfinished. As Poe was want to do, he revised the text and extended it into the shitbrick castle we view today. But that's okay. No one's perfect. Poe will go down in history as the man who wrote *The Cask of Amontillado* and *The Raven* and *Masque of the Red Death* and so on. He was a brilliantly-dark author of spectacular fiction. This novel is simply not that. And the fact that he knew *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* was, in his own words, "a very silly book", makes me respect him all the more.

In summation: I hate that I finished this one, but at least my buddy Thomas finally picked a stinker. I thought he'd never break my streak of choosing truly crappy literature, but he came through for me this time. Thanks, dude. Overall, this book is a trunk novel that people want to find reasoning in but have, so far, in almost two hundred years, not been able to clearly pin down. And that's because there's nothing to pin down. Not everything written has to make sense. Sometimes, some books are just bad. This is one of those bad books by a great writer. Deal with it.

Final Judgment: The anal leavings of a master wordsmith.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Nar...

Sr3yas says

Poe's only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* is not your average 19th-century adventure tale like those of *Jules Verne* or *Robert Louis Stevenson*. Instead, it's a type of tale which acts as a forefather for many tales to come and it's a hell of a weird ride.

The narrative introduces Augustus and our narrator, Arthur Gordon Pym. The first chapter tells a drunken adventure of these two boys. Not sure why that chapter is there, but it's there.

The next couple of chapters tells one of the best sea adventures I've read in a long time! As Augustus and his father decided to set sail for open ocean, Pym decides to join them anonymously with help of his friend.

Well, things went south quickly on that ship.

Filled with scenes of macabre, bloodletting and survival, those initial chapters were beautifully crafted by Poe. I especially loved the scene with the ghost ship. They were daunting and my imagination went wild there!

But then the story changes direction. Instead of sticking with the crazy atmosphere the story created in the initial chapters, Poe switches to an exploration and speculative narrative which reminded me of *Jules Verne* stories. It seems like Jules Verne was really influenced by this style. Verne was a lifelong fan of Poe and he even wrote a sequel to this novel in later years.

Anyways, we are now chilling with Pym and his gang in a new ship and they decide to explore the unexplored Antarctic region. They find a mysterious Island populated by a tribe of black (*Even their teeth are black*). The Island itself is a wonder as it is filled with undiscovered flora and fauna.

This part reads like Arthur Conan Doyle's novel, *The Lost World*. The previously undiscovered land with strange natives and bizarre environments? That's Doyle right there.

Now, this is a work that clearly inspired many writers. Even *HP Lovecraft* connects this story with his own novella, *At the Mountains of Madness*. But as a novel, the narrative suffers from inconsistent story and styles. To be honest, after the 13th chapter, the story sacrificed its momentum and failed to gain it back. So I'm thinking 5 stars for the first half and 2 stars for the rest.

Also, the ending was ... What was the ending? It felt like one of those weird deaths we hear about in news: The ones where people die abruptly as they were typing a senta

Vivian says

DNF 65%

Pulling the plug on this. I love Poe, or rather, I love his short stories. He just doesn't translate well into full length novels, too much repetition and descriptive exposition to keep interest. This worked out better for me as a sleep aid than a tale.

"The body from which it had been taken, resting as it did upon the rope, had been easily swayed to and from by the exertions of the carnivorous bird, and it was this motion which had at first impressed us with the belief of its being alive."

--This was the lure that kept me reading in hopes of uncovering another such gem. *sigh*

When you think you're going one place, *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* based story, only to find out you were misinformed and it's really more influenced by *Address on the Subject of a Surveying and Exploring Expedition to the Pacific Ocean and South Seas*.

I guess I'll read it for the cannibalism. There's no way to make that boring, or is there? I mean, it's not a cookbook. Even then, there are exciting ways of presenting it.

Matt says

I read this in the German **translation by Arno Schmidt** in preparation of Schmidt's Zettel's Traum, which deals with E.A.Poe.

I already read this book decades ago (in another translation) and liked it quite a bit. This "new" one though was quite another experience—a good one! If you know Arno Schmidt you also know about his rather unusual way of punctuation. In this book he uses it too, especially in the first part. I guess the usage of the equal=sign instead of the hyphen, the & instead of "und" ("and"), and I instead of "ein" ("a/an") may turn some people off ... but not me. I love it. And it's not overdone either.

Another great thing about Schmidt, for me, is his ingenious way of inventing new words that "just fit". Things like "Gekerke" instead of "Kerker" ("dungeon"), or "Labyrümpel" instead of "?" (there is no single equivalent word for it; it's a combination of "Labyrinth" and "Gerümpel" ("labyrinth" and "lumber")), or "Perückoid" instead of "Perückenteil" (some part of a wig—just think Donald Trump) made me laugh out loud. And again, he hasn't overdone it. I suppose it's due to Schmidt's reported atheism that he wrote the German word for "God" with *two* capital letters—"GOtt"—throughout the text. What I haven't figured out is the reason why some words are spelled differently sometimes. For instance "Silbe" and "Sylbe" ("syllable"), or "Hai" and "Hay" ("shark"). Maybe it's just a mistake by Schmidt that the editor hasn't noticed or was too shy to mention.

The result of Arno Schmidt's efforts led to a whole new book in my opinion. If I hadn't known in advance I never would have guessed that this is a translation! Of course there are people who complain about this very fact that the translation is *too far* from the original [see link to a newspaper article below]. So be it. If those people can decide what a good translation is in terms of nearness to the original, then they can obviously read the original. So, why don't they do it in the first place? For those of you who cannot read Poe in the original I advise you to check out the translation by Arno Schmidt. It's the next best thing!

Here are some quotes (from the original (source: Project Gutenberg) and the translation):

from Chapter I

original

"Matter!" he stammered, in the greatest apparent surprise, letting go the tiller at the same moment, and falling forward into the bottom of the boat—"matter!—why, nothing is the—matter—going home—d—d—don't you see?" The whole truth now flashed upon me. I flew to him and raised him up. He was drunk—beastly drunk—he could no longer either stand, speak, or see.

translation

„Los?“, stammelte er, anscheinend in höchstem Erstaunen; wobei er aber im selben Augenblick

das Steuer fahren ließ, und nach vornüber, auf den Boden des Bootes, fiel –: „los? – wieso; nix iss doch – los – heim geht’s – m= – m= – merxU das nich?“ Jetzt kam die volle Wahrheit wie ein Blitz über mich. Ich flog hin zu ihm, und richtete ihn auf –: Er war betrunken – viehisch besoffen – er konnte weder länger stehen noch sprechen noch sehen.

from Chapter II

original

Just as we turned the second corner, after passing Mr. Edmund’s well, who should appear, standing right in front of me, and looking me full in the face, but old Mr. Peterson, my grandfather. “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!”

translation

Gerade als wir an Mr. Edmunds Brunnen vorbei, und um die zweite Straßenecke danach waren, mußte doch *Wer* auftauchen, direkt vor mir stehen bleiben & mir mitten ins Gesicht starren –?–: natürlich der alte Mr. Peterson, mein Großvater. „Ja aber – meiner Seel’, Gordon“, sagte er, nach einer langen Pause, „wie, wie – Mensch, wessen dreck’jen Mantel hast den *Du* da an?!“. „Sir!“ gab ich zurück; nahm, in einem so kritischen Augenblick, nach Kräften die Miene beleidigten Erstaunens an, und sprach auch in den barschesten Tönen, die man sich nur vorstellen kann –: „Sir!, Sie kucken woll ’n büschen queer, was?! Erstens mal hat mein Name nicht die entfernteste Ähnlichkeit mit Goddin; und weiterhin möcht’ ich Ihn’n nur den 1 guten Tip geben, Sie Lump Sie, daß Sie mein’n neuen Überzieher nich nochmal dreckig nenn’n.“

from Chapter III

original

Shall I ever forget my feelings at this moment? He was going—my friend—my companion, from whom I had a right to expect so much—he was going—he would abandon me—he was gone! He would leave me to perish miserably, to expire in the most horrible and loathsome of dungeons—and one word—one little syllable would save me—yet that single syllable I could not utter! I felt, I am sure, more than ten thousand times the agonies of death itself.

translation

Ob ich jemals die Empfindungen dieser Augenblicke werde vergessen können?: da ging er – mein Feund – mein Gefährte, von dem ich ein Recht hatte, das Höchste zu erwarten – da ging er – verließ mich – war praktisch schon fort! War drauf & dran, mich dem erbärmlichsten Zugrundegehen zu überlassen, dem Verröcheln im allerekligsten & =schrecklichsten Gekerkre – und ein Wörtlein – ach was, 1 arme Silbe würde mich retten –: und diese 1=einzige Silbe wollte nicht aus mir heraus! Ich habe damals, das weiß ich gewiß, die Schrecken des Todes

10.000 Mal durchlebt.

from Chapter IV

original

His arms, as well as legs, were *bowed* in the most singular manner, and appeared to possess no flexibility whatever. His head was equally deformed, being of immense size, with an indentation on the crown (like that on the head of most negroes), and entirely bald. To conceal this latter deficiency, which did not proceed from old age, he usually wore a wig formed of any hair-like material which presented itself—occasionally the skin of a Spanish dog or American grizzly bear.

translation

Seine Arme, und die Beine nicht minder, waren in der allereigentümlichsten Weise *gebogen*; und schienen keinerlei Flexibilität zu besitzen. Gleichermassen verformt war sein Kopf; von unwahrscheinlicher Größe & mit einer kleinen Dälle auf dem Scheitel (wie sie sich bei den meisten Negerschädeln vorfindet), und dazu völlig kahl. Um letztbesagten Defekt, der nicht etwa von hohem Alter herrührte, zu tarnen, trug er gewöhnlich ein Perückoid, aus dem erst=besten haarähnlichen Material, das just bei der Hand war – vom Fell eines spanischen Wachtelhündchens an, bis notfalls hinauf zum amerikanischen Grizzly.

from Chapter V

original

He pushed on for some time in a most pitiable state of anxiety, until, at length, he found the pathway utterly blocked up, and that there was no possibility of making any farther way by the course in which he had set out. Overcome now by his feelings, he threw himself among the lumber in despair, and wept like a child.

translation

So kämpfte er sich, in einem wahrhaft bemitleidenswerten Zustand von Niedergeschlagenheit noch eine Weile fürder; bis er endlich seinen Nicht=Pfad endgültig blockiert fand; und erkennen mußte, daß es auf diesem zur Zeit eingeschlagtenen Wege, keine Möglichkeit eines Weiterkommens mehr gebe. Da warf er sich, übermannt von seinen Gefühlen, voller Verzweiflung mitten ins Labyrumpel hin, und weinte wie ein Kind.

from Chapter VI

original

The stowage on board the *Grampus* was most clumsily done, if stowage that could be called

which was little better than a promiscuous huddling together of oil-casks[1] and ship furniture.

[1: Whaling vessels are usually fitted with iron oil-tanks—why the Grampus was not I have never been able to ascertain.]

translation

Die Ladung an Bord der GRAMPUS nun, war aufs ungeschickteste gestaut worden; vorausgesetzt, daß man mit 'Stauen' bezeichnen will, was in wenig mehr als einem huddligen Über' nanderhäufen von Ölfässern & Schiffsausrüstung bestand.*

[* Walfangschiffe sind für gewöhnlich mit eisernen Öltanks ausgerüstet – wieso das beim GRAMPUS nicht der Fall war, habe ich niemals in Erfahrung bringen können.]

from Chapter XII

original

They are frequently found of an enormous size. I have myself seen several which would weigh from twelve to fifteen hundred pounds, although I do not remember that any navigator speaks of having seen them weighing more than eight hundred. Their appearance is singular, and even disgusting. Their steps are very slow, measured, and heavy, their bodies being carried about a foot from the ground. Their neck is long, and exceedingly slender; from eighteen inches to two feet is a very common length, and I killed one, where the distance from the shoulder to the extremity of the head was no less than three feet ten inches.

translation

Man trifft häufig Exemplare von enormer Größe an. Ich habe selbst einige gesehen, die zwischen zwölf= und fünfzehnhundert Pfund gewogen haben müssen; obwohl ich mich nicht erinnern kann, daß Reisende berichtet hätten, je Stücke von über 800 Pfund Gewicht angetroffen zu haben. Ihr Aussehen ist sonderbar, ja, zum Teil widerlich. Die Schritte erfolgen sehr langsam, abgemessen & schwerfällig; wobei der Leib etwa 1 Fuß überm Erdboden getragen wird. Ihr Hals ist lang & dabei äußerst geschlank: 45-60 Zentimeter ist eine ganz normale Länge; und ich habe einmal eine erlegt, wo der Abstand von der Schulter bis zur Schädelspitze nicht weniger als 115 betrug.

from Chapter XIV

original

Besides the penguin many other birds are here to be found, among which may be mentioned seahens, blue peterels, teal, ducks, Port Egmont hens, shags, Cape pigeons, the nelly, seaswallows, terns, seagulls, Mother Carey's chickens, Mother Carey's geese, or the great peterel, and, lastly, the albatross.

The great peterel is as large as the common albatross, and is carnivorous. It is frequently called

the break-bones, or osprey peterel.

translation

Neben dem Pinguin sind noch viele andere Vogelarten hier vertreten, von denen die Lumme erwähnt sei, der blaue Sturmvogel, die Krickente, sowie Enten allgemein, Port=Egmont=Hennen (also Raubmöven), Krähenscharten, Captauben, ›Nellies‹ (oder Riesensturmvoegel), See= & Meer=Schwalben, Seemöven, ›Mutter Careys Küchlein‹ (Fulmar), ›Mutter Carey's Gans‹ oder der Große Sturmvogel, und endlich noch der Albatross. Der Große Peters= oder Sturm=Vogel wird ebenso groß wie der gewöhnliche Albatross, und ist ein überaus reißendes Tier, weshalb er auch häufig als ›Knochenbrecher‹ oder ›Fischadler‹ bezeichnet wird.

=====

Ein=Schub

I discovered an article from the Zeit=Online=Magazin in which the author complains that there were no good translations of E.A.Poe into German. In particular, he, the article=writer, has nothing good to say about Arno Schmidt's translation of *Arthur Gordon Pym*. Instead he praises the new (in 2009) translation by Hans Schmid as a *gain*. To prove his thesis, the following paragraph is quoted:

original

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. It was blowing almost a gale, and the weather was very cold – it being late in October. I sprang out of bed, nevertheless, in a kind of ecstasy, and told him I was quite as brave as himself, and quite as tired as he was of lying in bed like a dog...

translation (by Arno Schmidt)

Ich kann schwerlich klar formulieren, was mich jetzt überkam; aber kaum, daß diese Worte aus seinem Munde waren, verspürte ich einen Schauer aus kitzelndster Erregung & Lüsterheit; und seine Tollmannsidee dünkte mich eine der ergötzlichsten & logischsten Angelegenheiten von der Welt. Der Wind war nahezu böig zu nennen, und das Wetter empfindlich kalt – ging es doch schon gegen Ende Oktober. Nichtsdestoweniger sprang ich aus dem Bett; und informierte ihn, daß ich genauso tapfer sei wie er auch; und gänzlich so überdrüssig, wie er, mich wie ein Hund im Bette zusammenzurollen...

translation (by Hans Schmid)

Ich kann kaum sagen, was da in mich gefahren ist, aber die Worte waren kaum über seine Lippen gekommen, da durchfuhr mich bereits ein Gefühl der größten Freude und Erregung, und ich hielt seine verrückte Idee für einen der wunderbarsten und vernünftigsten Vorschläge von der Welt. Draußen tobte schon fast ein Sturm, und das Wetter war sehr kalt – es war Ende Oktober. Trotzdem sprang ich in einer Art Ekstase aus dem Bett und sagte ihm, ich sei genauso mutig wie er, und genau wie er hätte ich genug davon, wie ein Hund im Bett zu liegen...

Granted – AS’s translation is not as close to the original as the one from HS. But – let’s face it – isn’t the one from AS just terrific? ... and way more fun?! If anything should ever be so close to the original; why then – with all due respect – shouldn’t one go directly to the original and read that?

=====

from the last Chapter

original

Many unusual phenomena now indicated that we were entering upon a region of novelty and wonder. A high range of light gray vapour appeared constantly in the southern horizon, flaring up occasionally in lofty streaks, now darting from east to west, now from west to east, and again presenting a level and uniform summit—in short, having all the wild variations of the Aurora Borealis.

translation

Manch ungewöhnliches Fänomen deutete nun darauf hin, daß wir im Begriffe stünden, in eine Region der Novitäten & Wunder einzudringen. Ein hohe Bande aus lichtgrauem Gedämpf erschien beständig am südlichen Horizont; flackerte gelegentlich auf, in luft’gen Streifen, die jetzt von Ost nach West, jetzt von Ost nach West schossen; dann zeigte der obere Rand sich wieder eben & einförmig – kurzum, sie hatte all die wild= & wirre Veränderlichkeit der Aurora Borealis.

Update 10/5/16

While reading Arno Schmidt’s Zettels Traum I realize there’s a lot more to Poe’s text than meets the eyes at first glance. Listening to Dän’s (a character from ZT) explanation of *Etymys* I think it makes sense to add this short piece to the list of translations (from Chapter 25):

original

Many unusual phenomena now—indicated that we were entering upon a region of novelty and wonder.

translation

Manch ungewöhnliches Fänomen deutete nun darauf hin, daß wir im Begriff stünden, in eine Region der Novitäten & Wunder einzudringen.

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Nikos Tsentemeidis says

Συγκλονιστικός Poe.

Στην ιστορία της λογοτεχνίας λ'γοι κατ'χουν τόσο καλή την τέχνη της γραφής.
Και δεν είναι μόνο η γραφή, είναι οι τεχνικές που χρησιμοποιεί, η σημειολογία κτλ, τα οποία περιγράφονται πολύ καλύτερα στα παραρτήματα του βιβλίου.

Απ' τα κλασικά βιβλία που αντιλαμβάνεσαι την σπουδαιότητα αυτών. Ήπος!!!

Richard says

Dear The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym,

I love you. I hate you. You confuse me because you evoke within me such conflicting emotions. The truth? I really got into a relationship with you because I thought that you would be a straight-up maritime adventure novel a la "Master and Commander." I heard you inspired Herman Melville when he was writing Moby Dick. That's what I was looking for. What I got was... well, what are you, Arthur?

Here's the thing, Gordy: you were always good as an adventure novel. That was your strength and I always liked that about you. I liked your gruesome tales of cannibalism, the ship of dead people, the mutiny, the shark attacks, killing a polar bear with a knife and the sprays of blood, etc. But then, oh God, there were the parts where you devolved into long passages about nautical terminology. For pages and pages you rattled off longitudes and latitudes and the way the sea currents were running. I almost left you then. You were elegant as hell, but I was bored off my ass. "Stick to the action, Arthur," I wanted to say, "If I wanted a travelogue I'd read 'The Voyage of the Beagle.' If I wanted a treatise about the nesting habits of frigate birds I'd pick up a Time-Life book or check out Wikipedia."

I feel like you are trying to be all things to all people, Arthur. I think this has to do with your origins, how you were published episodically in a newspaper and had to appeal a variety of readers. And while I admire your versatility, I think you should just stick to who you really are, deep down: an adventure novel. Or maybe, again, that's just who I wanted you to be and I'm projecting my expectations on you. If you feel smothered by me, that's fine.

And you are a racist son of a bitch, too. All the black guys are either mutineers or knuckle-dragging savages? Come on!

Arthur, I'm sorry it didn't work out. I wanted to love you so bad. I want to compare you other lovers: your lost civilizations reminded me of Borges, your castaways reminded me of Robert Louis Stevenson, you seem at times like you could've been a pulp novel penned in the early twentieth century---all swashbuckle and edge-of-your-seat adventure. But I just can't look past your flaws. And maybe that's my fault. I think our age difference is a chasm between us. You come from different generation. I can't help but judge you by my modern standards of tolerance (and post-Hemingway appreciation for strong, brief sentences) and that's not fair to either of us. I'm sure there's a better reader out there for you, somewhere, Arthur. We had some good

times this past week and a half, but I'm glad to move on. I'm eager to start a relationship with another book. Me and Raymond Chandler have been seeing each other lately, and I think I might pursue that a little. I'm eager to start a new chapter in my reading life (sorry for the pun).

Don't take any of this personally. Again: it's not you, Arthur. It's me.

Sincerely,
Richard Porter

P.S. Bad-ass cover, BTW.

FotisK says

Εξαιρετικ? περιπετει?δες αν?γνωσμα, το οπο?ο ανθ?σταται σθεναρ? στα "πυρ? του χρ?νου", προσφ?ροντας αναγνωστικ? απ?λαυση υψηλο? επιπ?δου, ?ντας αντ?ξιο εν?ς συγγραφ?α-μ?θου. Θα μπορο?σα να με?νω σε αυτ? και να κλε?σω εδ? την κριτικ? μου ?σον αφορ? το κυρ?ως ?ργο, αλλ? φευ...

Π?ς να μην σχολι?σω αρνητικ? τις πολυσ?λιδες αναλ?σεις επ? αναλ?σεων, τις "σεντονι?δες", τα σχοινοτεν? σχ?λια και παραπομπ?ς τ?σο του επιμελητ? ?σο και των κριτικ?ν που καταλαμβ?νουν μεγ?λο μ?ρος τ?ς κατ? τα λοιπ? εξαιρετικ?ς ?κδοσης (περ? τις 200 σελ?δες χοντρικ?). Η δε μαν?α των εκδοτικ?ν να τοποθετο?ν μια Εισαγωγ? στην οπο?α αναλ?εται σχεδ?ν εξολοκλ?ρου το ?ργο, δι?τι προφαν?ς ο αναγ?στης ?δη γνωρ?ζει τι θα διαβ?σει ? ,εξ?σου πιθαν?, διαβ?ζει για πολλοστ? φορ? το ?ργο, παραμ?νει ακαταν?ητη και συν?μα εκνευριστικ?, σ' εμ?να τουλ?χιστον.

Ομολογ? εξαρχ?ς πως σε μικρ?τερη ηλικ?α θα απολ?μβανα τους εν λ?γω ελιτ?στικους μηχανισμο?ς και τις αναλ?σεις που θα προσ?διδαν κ?ρος στην κεντρικ? ιστορ?α. Πλ?ον, τους θεωρ? περιοριστικο?ς και ως ?να βαθμ? αντιστικο?ς. Συγκεκριμ?να, πιστε?ω πως πρ?κειται αφεν?ς για διανοουμεν?στικη επιδειξιμαν?α προκειμ?νου να εντυπωσιαστο?ν οι απανταχο? συν?δελφοι-κριτικο?, αφετ?ρου για την αν?γκη των διανοο?μενων να επενδ?σουν με "Ν?ημα" (αθ?νατε Χ?ρρυ Κλυνν!) ?ποιο σημαντικ? λογοτεχνικ? ?ργο. Πρ?κειται εμφαν?ς για ?ναν μηχανισμ? απενοχοπο?ησης, απαρα?τητη παρ?μετρο για τους παροικο?ντες την "Βαλχ?λλα του Πνε?ματος". Εν τ?λει, εφ?σον κ?ποιος δεν καλε?ται να συγγρ?ψει μια εργασ?α ? διατριβ? για τον Poe, δεν ?χει καν?ναν λ?γο να αναλ?σει πολ?τιμο χρ?νο.

Το?του δοθ?ντος, δεν παραγνωρ?ζω το γεγον?ς πως το βιβλ?ο βρ?θει αλληγορι?ν και πολλαπλ?ν αναγν?σεων, στοιχε?α που το καθιστο?ν ασ?γκριτο. Εξ?σου σαφ?ς ε?ναι και η ρατσιστικ? οπτικ? του Poe και του ?ρω? του, κ?τι λογικ? για τα δεδομ?να της εποχ?ς και του τ?που προ?λευσης.

Προφαν?ς δεν χρ?ζει αιτιολ?γησης ο?τε καυτηριασμο? – ουδ?λως πρ?πει να μας αφορο?ν οι προθ?σεις, οι απ?ψεις και το ποιον του συγγραφ?α, παρ? μ?νο η ποι?τητα του ?ργου του!

Εντο?τοις, αναλ?σεις -?πως στις περιπτ?σεις συνεχο?ς εγκλεισμο? και εξ?δου του ?ρωα απ? αμπ?ρια, υπ?γειες στο?ς κλπ.- τις οπο?ες ο κριτικ?ς συναρτ? με το "πρωκτικ? και εντερικ? στ?διο" ? ακ?μα αναφορ?ς στο Γιουνγκ-ιαν? συλλογικ? ασυνε?δητο και στα κ?θε λογ?ς Φρο?δικ? αρχ?τυπα προκαλο?ν κατ? πρ?τον ?φθονο γ?λωτα και κατ? δε?τερον δεν μπορο?ν παρ? να επικριθο?ν για ψυχολογισμ? της πλ?κας (μην πω κ?τι βαρ?τερο!).

Συγκεφαλαι?νοντας, καταλ?γω στο ?τι ο σχολαστικισμ?ς και ο λογιотаτισμ?ς σκοτ?νουν την απ?λαυση της αφ?γησης. Και η "Αφ?γηση του Α.Γ.Π" ε?ναι ?να ?ργο που απαιτε? τη "δ?ψα" του αναγ?στη για ποιοτικ? λογοτεχν?α. Τα λοιπ? ε?ναι εκ του περισσο?.

Thomas Strömquist says

OK, OK, I picked it, but I shouldn't carry all the guilt! For my and Edward's first buddy read of the year, I really felt for a classic and, due to our unusually late-in-the-month start, we had decided on one not overly long. So those were the constraints - or so I thought. My research into all and every one of my ingenious choices ended with Edward's detailed review of the book. So, he deserves some of the blame for deliberately narrowing the possible choices by reading so many books.

So there.

By some unfortunate event, I stumbled upon "Pym" and, after finding out that it was not in either Tales of Mystery and Imagination or Selected Tales, I realized that I most likely never read it. First thing to do is to settle in with the never-ending sentences and colorful descriptions that is 19th century prose - not to mention the theatricality of character actions and reactions; Pym, in disguise, meets his uncle on the docks. Since he wishes to stay undetected, he denies being who he is, counting on the uncles poor eyesight to be enough for him to doubt his conclusion. When told that the man he met is not his nephew the uncle doesn't react in the modern fashion: "Sorry, my mistake", but in the old-fashioned way: "He started back two or three steps, turned first pale and then excessively red, threw up his spectacles, then, putting them down, ran full tilt at me, with his umbrella uplifted" ...

Anyways, Pym goes to sea, first a tentative and badly ending try on his own boat and later as a stowaway on his friends father's ship. The first story feels a bit like a warm-up, but the second one is a very chilling and effective story on horrors of the sea. Almost 2/3rds of the book is really good. Unfortunately, since Poe was obviously determined to take the step to novel-writing, the last third - following what should have (and would have in any other story) been the climax - offers a disjointed and unengaging story of southward exploration. It actually drags the first and very much better part down with it and made the book as a whole of less interest. To top it off, we get a bail-out ending that makes zero sense (actually, the last part feels like a never-ending serial of old, that really doesn't hold together and then the author just quit). I don't think the ending works with the prologue at all, but I can't be bothered to go back and re-read any of this.

In conclusion; sorry about this Edward, my friend.

There are upsides though - buddy reads are always fun and, especially when he dislikes a book, Edward's review will surely be both entertaining and interesting, so check it out!

Alex says

Pym is a great delirious fever nightmare of a novel, barely a novel at all, influencing everything from Moby-Dick to Lovecraft. It shares with Treasure Island an archetypal feel: when Poe describes being lost at sea and debating cannibalism, you think, "So this is where my brain got that image from."

It's fairly insane, as books go. There's Poe's usual fascination with being buried alive, and as thrilling a description of vertigo as I've ever read. He seems to have had no particular structure in mind; he hated the idea of novels and wrote this one for money. He changes gears at will. The dog Tiger appears from nowhere and disappears to nowhere. And then there's that ending.

It's racist as hell. I mean, the evil black cook and jabbering natives would be bad enough on their own but that's just scratching the surface here: the entire *book* is about black and white, black representing everything uncivilized and evil and amply personified by black people. The book itself is *in* black and white. Not shades of grey: monochrome. Antichrome. Those jabbering natives, like, when someone's white shirt brushes a guy's face he's like "Oh God no, white stuff!" (*Tekeli-li!*) The water on their island is dark purple. It reminded me of that line from Third Bass's classic Gas Face:

Black cat is bad luck, bad guys wear black:
Musta been a white guy who started all that.

Poe was himself badly racist, pro-slavery, so let's not fool ourselves here. But it is also true that Pym as a narrator is an asshole, and the native chief Too-Wit's response to white explorers is entirely reasonable (as Mat Johnson points out in his book *Pym*) and the only other competent character in the book is Dirk Peters, who's Native American by way of black, and...I don't know, the racism here didn't bother me as much as it might have, somehow. I mean, I'm bumping it down a star because I facepalmed several times, but...Poe himself bothers me. This book doesn't.

But speaking of black vs. white, let's talk about this ending here (with no plot spoilers but a feel spoiler), one of the most surprising endings in literature. When I got to it I thought my edition was screwed up somehow - "Where's the rest of it?" It's like someone told Poe how many words are in a novel, and when he got to that many he just dropped the mic. But I like it, honestly. It feels right. Some endings wrap everything up and yet you feel dissatisfied; but some books do what they need to do and then quit, and this is that type.

Paul says

1.5 stars

This is Poe's only novel; published in 1838. I haven't read any Poe for many years, having read some of his poetry and his short stories in my teens. This is an odd novel. Arthur Gordon Pym and his friend Augustus are teenagers in search of adventure. Augustus's father is a sea captain. A voyage is in the offing and Augustus contrives to enable Pym to stow away. A series of adventures ensues; each more farfetched than the previous. There is a bloody mutiny, followed by a shipwreck with Pym and a small number of survivors left on the wreckage of the ship. A long period of floating around leads to cannibalism, an encounter with a ship floating aimlessly with only corpses on board and finally rescue by another ship. This ship is on a fur collecting expedition and it continues to slaughter lots of seals. It sails into the Antarctic regions, which prove to be surprisingly warm. Poe attempts to invent lots of new species of bird and when habitable islands are reached invents a few mammals as well. Inhabited islands are reached populated by "natives" who are primitive but appear friendly. They prove to be unfriendly and most of the crew are killed and the ship destroyed. Pym and three others manage to escape in a canoe and head for the South Pole as the descriptions become increasingly surreal. The ending gives a nod to Reynolds and the hollow earth theories popular at the time.

On the surface this reads like one of many nineteenth century adventure novels by writers such as Haggard, Stevenson and Kipling; comparisons are also drawn with *Moby Dick*. This being Poe, of course, there is more going on; indeed there is a whole industry of interpretation. There are clearly allegorical and autobiographical elements and there are also elements of cryptography (an interest of Poe's). Some of the allegorical elements are said to be religious (not convinced by that).

The novel was obviously written in haste and there are lots of continuity errors. Poe is also a bit of a geek about the sea and sailing and there are long descriptive passages about navigation, climate, latitude and longitude, which although well written can be irksome. However it is on lots of best novel lists; Borges rated

it and Freud was fascinated by it as he felt it explored man's unconscious desire for annihilation. However you analyse and break down this novel (and it is well written with some interesting and experimental aspects), there is an issue which stands out and that is race. Poe was from the South and this was written when slavery and everything that went with it was still in place. Poe's biographers have pointed out that Poe did not approve of the abolition and believed that black people were inferior.

It is noteworthy that one of the principal mutineers was the black cook who portrayed as a monster with no redeeming features;

"The bound seamen were dragged to the gangway. Here the cook stood with an axe, striking each victim on the head... In this manner twenty-two perished."

The stereotypes keep coming. The islanders who are amazed at the white skins of their visitors are portrayed as primitive and almost sub-human; they are also treacherous. Poe describes them thus;

"In truth, from every thing 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."

You could blame the times Poe was writing in, but this isn't good enough. Poe in his article "The Philosophy of Composition" argues that writing (both poetry and prose) should show truth and meaning. The meaning here is that black is bad and white is the opposite. Toni Morrison has forcibly made this point;

"Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; nor repulsive, but desirable. Africanist idiom is used to establish difference or, in a later period, to signal modernity."

Matt Johnson's novel Pym is an interesting counterpoint where a good black protagonist encounters white savages in the Antarctic; and the point is made;

"You want to understand Whiteness, as a pathology and a mindset, you have to look to the source of its assumptions. ... That's why Poe's work mattered. It offered passage on a vessel bound for the primal American subconscious, the foundation on which all our visible systems and structures were built."

I wanted to like this, but I'm with Toni Morrison on this one.

Azumi says

[barco fantasma, con esa gaviotilla tan maja ^-^ (hide spoiler)]

Nancy Oakes says

Read in April.

for plot, etc. you can go here ; otherwise, as usual, read on.

Since the first time I read this book some years ago, I've done a lot of reading about it and I've discovered that even Poe scholars can't agree on what to make of it. Dana D. Nelson in her *The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature, 1638-1867* notes that

"Readings of Pym range widely, from psychoanalytic exploration to social satire, from self-referential commentary on writing (or reading) to a metacritical demonstration of utter absence of meaning. Those commenting on the text apparently cannot reach any consensus or 'thrust toward uniformity,'..."

Depending on which/whose critique/analysis you read, Poe's Pym is either a seagoing take on the American push for frontier expansion, an interior journey into the self, a quest novel (vis-a-vis Harold Bloom's definition, mentioned in this edition's introduction, [27]) a "jeremiad of the evils of slavery" or "covert statement of Southern racist ideology" [29], and it has even been noted as (in part) a story of thwarted colonialism (from Mat Johnson's hilarious novel *Pym*). Author Toni Morrison also argues re Poe's work that "no early American writer is more important to the concept of American Africanism than Poe" because of the "focus on the symbolism of black and white in Poe's novel."

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym is a strange but interesting little book. According to that online font of knowledge called Wikipedia, Poe himself called this "a silly little book," and in some ways he's definitely right. It is way over the top and as another GR reviewer puts it, the "elephant in the room" of racism is definitely there. [as an aside, whether Poe was/was not a racist is still a matter of debate in scholarly circles.] After having read it, I can see why there are so many different interpretations of this novel (you can also add in *bildungsroman*), but in my opinion, no matter how you read it, it is much like many of Poe's other works, largely concerned with confronting the self in terms of other (if nothing else, the scene where he is disguised as a dead man and can't recognize himself in the mirror is a huge clue), and the destabilization of the self that follows as a result. In the end, though I believe it's a novel best appreciated on an individual basis -- I mean, seriously, if vast numbers of scholars over the last 100-plus years can't agree about the nature of Pym, how can there be any definitive interpretation?

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A brief word about this book: for anyone remotely interested in further studies of Poe's Pym, this particular edition from Broadview Press is a good place to start. The narrative is extensively footnoted, and there are three appendices -- "Sources for the Novel", "Contemporary Reviews," and "Other Writers' Responses to Pym" (Melville, Beaudelaire, Jules Verne, and Henry James). It also has an extensive bibliography and even a map of Pym's travels.

Anna says

βιβλ?ο που εκδ?θηκε το 1838 και γ?νονται μ?σα... της Παναγι?ς τα μ?τια!!!! Λαμπρ? μυαλ? ο Π?ε, σε συνδυασμ? με τα βιβλ?α του Lovecraft νομ?ζω ?τι θα αποτελο?ν ?μπνευση για paranormal thrillers εις τους αι?νες των αι?νων!!!!

Αξεπ?ραστο, μοναδικ?, ευκολοδι?βαστο, θα σας σοκ?ρει ?σο λ?γα, πολ? αν?τερο απ? το νησ? των θησαυρ?ν ? τις περιπ?τειες του Ιουλ?ου Βερν, θα το σ?γκρινα μ?νο με τα Βουν? της Τρ?λας. Ειλικριν? απορ? π?ς γ?νεται να μην ?χουμε δει καν?να απ? τα δυο αριστουργ?ματα ακ?μα στο σινεμ?
