

THROUGH A GLACIER DARKLY:

Reversals of Race and Gender in Polar Fiction of the Nineteenth Century

By Steve Asselin,
Department of English
McGill University

Submitted June 2010

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment
of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

© Steve Asselin, June 2010

ABSTRACT / ABSTRAIT

The Arctic and the Antarctic are put forward as among the few remaining ‘blank’ spaces on the map available to nineteenth-century writers for speculative fiction, with polar narratives functioning as a bridge between the travelogue and science-fiction proper. Examining gender in these narratives, the Arctic is typically sexed as male, whereas the Antarctic is designated female. The male explorer protagonist is emasculated before the hyper-masculinity of the Arctic and the overpowering femininity of the Antarctic alike. Turning to race, white explorers venturing into white regions find that their racial status is challenged by superior instances of whiteness. They are also confronted by competing ideologies wherein their whiteness is denied, or the very notion of white superiority is inverted. However, polar narratives also introduce doubt about the internal credibility of their stories through a number of narrative techniques, curtailing the effect of the questions they raise regarding received notions of race and gender.

L’arctique et l’antarctique sont présentées comme parmi les derniers endroits ‘blancs’ sur la carte où les auteurs du dix-neuvième siècle pouvaient situer leurs récits fantastiques; ils forment un lien entre le récit de voyages et la science-fiction comme telle. Examinant l’usage des sexes dans ces récits, l’arctique est typiquement présenté de façon masculin; cependant, l’antarctique rappelle le féminin. Le héros explorateur mâle est aussi émasculé devant l’hyper-masculinité de l’arctique comme la puissance féminine de l’antarctique. Considérant l’idée de la ‘race,’ les explorateurs blancs qui s’aventurent dans des régions blanches découvrent que leur statut racial est confronté par des exemples de blancheur supérieure à leurs. Ils sont aussi confrontés par des idéologies locales dans lesquelles leur blancheur est déniée, ou l’idée même de la supériorité blanche est inversée. Cependant, les récits polaires introduisent du doute envers la crédibilité interne de leurs histoires grâce à un nombre de techniques littéraires, courbant l’impact des questions qu’ils posent sur les idées typiques de sexe et race.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project of this scope is never accomplished alone, and this author wishes to acknowledge the aid of many different people and institutions in bringing this work to fruition. To begin with, I'm grateful to all of the authors of the primary texts, for producing such wonderful and involving fiction in the first place. This project would naturally have been impossible without the critics, scholars and researchers whose work make up the bibliography, with particular thanks reserved for Jen Hill as both inspiration and a touchstone of this research. Professors Peter Gibian, Alan Hepburn, Maggie Kilgour, and Monica Popescu at McGill University provided important advice on generating the project, revising proposals and securing funding. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada provided a very generous research grant that allowed the writer to dedicate more time to the writing of this thesis. Financial support was also provided by a fellowship from McGill University and the Mary Keenan scholarship. I must also acknowledge the forbearance of family, friends and familial pets who too often found themselves exiled from my attention during intense bouts of writing, but were always there to support me—emotionally and logistically—when I came up for air. Most of all, I extend my eternal gratitude to the project supervisor, Professor Monique Morgan of McGill University, who shepherded this research for two years, provided priceless advice on the project proposal, funding and researching, as well as invaluable feedback on the work itself as it was produced, to make it far more incisive, considered, and all around better, and all this often to inhumane deadlines. Thank you all.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: SIGHTING THE ICE	1
MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF SNOW: A NOTE ON GENRE	7
PART I: TOPS AND BOTTOMS:	
GENDERED LANDSCAPES AND MASCULINE PERILS	15
NORTH: THE MOST MASCULINE ENVIRONMENT.....	17
SOUTH: FEMALE GEOGRAPHY LITERALIZED	26
UNMANNED AT THE EXTREME	37
PART II: WHITE SKIN, BLANK SPACES:	
THE EUROPEAN AS RACIAL OTHER	49
SYMZONIA: A SURFEIT OF WHITENESS	52
TSALAL: A LACK OF WHITENESS.....	60
THE ORIENTAL CONNECTION.....	68
PART III: POLAR MIRAGES:	
THE UNCERTAIN SHAPE OF THE STORY	79
<i>FATA MORGANA</i> : UNCERTAINTY THROUGH NESTED NARRATIVE	82
TRACKS IN THE SNOW: REWRITING AND OMISSION	90
CONCLUSION: “WHERE THERE IS DOUBT...”	98
WORKS CITED.....	102

INTRODUCTION: SIGHTING THE ICE

There has always been a concordance between writing and exploration, simultaneous processes of discovery and documentation. The earliest literary heroes—Rama, Gilgamesh, Odysseus—were wanderers par excellence, whose travels mapped out the known world and drew the boundaries of cultures and incipient nations. In these geographic mythologies, the creative act of naming and filling up the spaces beyond, both horizontally across the world and vertically into spiritual realms above and below, also helped to define the center from which such tales emerged, often in opposition to what was ‘discovered’ to lie in foreign realms; and so narratives of exploration gave rise to narratives of nations and races.

Writer and explorer share a tool, the physical medium—whether papyrus, parchment or paper—onto which their lines are inscribed, the latitudes and longitudes, sentences and stanzas. For both, the blank spaces upon these documents represent a kind of anxious thrill, frustratingly and tantalizingly unknown, brimming with possibilities and pitfalls. It is a challenge to the capacities of both, to fill in those spaces and possibly, in doing so, win wealth and/or renown; and because of the physical challenges of mapping the world, the imagination of the author would often precede the expeditions of the explorer into the blank spaces of the world, only to often discover themselves rather than anything external in the process.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the long-standing traditions of such forms in European literature came to a crux; the number of locales suitable to such narratives was dwindling, and the genre would need to reinvent itself in order to create new blank spaces into which to project their fictions. Fictive travelogues, whether sensational or satirical, and the imagined communities of utopian tracts had long used distant realms across the seas to set their strange or admirable societies, kingdoms of undiscovered continents or remote island nations. Yet by the nineteenth century, most of the map had been delineated. The deepest interiors of South America, Africa and Australia remained

to be explored, and indeed those blank spaces proved fertile ground for writers like H. Rider Haggard and Arthur Conan Doyle to situate their lost kingdoms and forgotten lands. But the coastlines of the continents and attendant rivers had been carefully detailed by the naval empires of Europe—that is, all but one.

Undiscovered islands, by virtue of their smaller size, could not be so confidently dismissed; phantom island chains like the Auroras teased the imagination of sailors, who wanted to bring under the control of western knowledge, and whatever nation they represented, the last recalcitrant patches of land in the vast expanses of blue. Captain Guy, the hapless master of the schooner *Jane Guy* in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, makes the search for the Auroras a prelude to the ship's disastrous voyage of discovery to the southern pole (Poe 518-519). But by the close of the century, even these perennial phantoms had been stricken from those maps that had included them¹. While minor islands continued to be located, the verdict of cartographers as the century drew to an end was clear: it was terribly unlikely that any territories of note remained to be discovered and claimed—anything sizeable enough had already been found.

Of course, writers would continue to find their protagonists leading expeditions to, or shipwrecked and stranded upon, minor islands of their own creation; it was a favoured plot device for the sensation writers of the day, as it would the pulp fiction of later decades. R. M. Ballantyne was particularly fond of the motif, with his youthful male protagonists often living by their wits and brawn on deserted islands pending rescue, or fending off local tribes. These literary natives almost always had small populations and low levels of technology and social organization to reflect the scale of the adventure and limited geography of the island setting. Nonetheless, an author looking to situate their speculative fiction, the new constellations of geology, flora, fauna and human society that their imagination had spawned, on looking upon the increasingly-inked map of the world would come to a realization: the blank spaces in which to set their stories were becoming rare indeed.

¹ See, for instance, Henry Stommel, *Lost Islands*.

Other options were needed. Some would follow their mythic forebears and send their heroes up or down instead of across the surface of the globe; only instead of spiritual realms, heavens and hells, they would come upon material realms—much like our own, for all the superficial differences—that allowed them to continue the tradition of imaginary exploration. Going below spawned a relatively limited field of narratives about a hollow Earth and the lands that may exist within, such as ‘Adam Seaborn’s’ *Symzonia* or, most famously, Jules Verne’s *Voyage au centre de la Terre*. More fruitful was the practice of looking first to the moon and then the orbs beyond to create alien environments and societies, the final stage of the transition from travelogue into science-fiction proper. Others still moved sideways, into realms of fantasy, or looked back to mythic pasts, treating the timeline much as forbears had the map, and filling in the blank spaces of history.

Amidst and congruent with this diversification, there were two major exceptions to the phenomenon of the inked-in map, the Arctic and the Antarctic, two perfectly worldly blank spaces which had remained blank for the same reasons: the extreme hostility of the climate to human habitation, and the difficulties posed by icy seas to navigation, rendering these twin regions virtually impenetrable by the usual means available to nineteenth-century explorers. The ‘conquest’ of the poles would have to wait for the expeditions of the early twentieth century; the sailors and adventurers of the nineteenth century had to content themselves with observations at the periphery or failed attempts to reach the exterior, turned aside by deprivation and the elements.

From those observations, however, it was generally seen that the polar regions were blank spaces not merely on the maps, but at the literal level as well: vast expanses of whiteness, bound in ice and snow. These were generally perceived as uninhabited, which was true for the Antarctic continent; the northern polar regions had a number of hardy Inuit tribal cultures which made a living on the outskirts of the Arctic circle, particularly in North America. The (largely marine-based) fauna and flora that had adapted and thrived in the polar regions

were known, to a limited extent.² Such local life led an odd kind of dual existence in the popular imagination of Anglophone publics and presses: they could be held up for individual consumption as exotic phenomena—the foreign customs of Inuit people, the remarkable cold-environment adaptations of the native plants and animals—a modern day catalogue of wonders. However, they could just as quickly be deliberately forgotten, made to vanish into the whiteness, in order to play up narratives of the polar regions, particularly the better-known (at the time) Arctic, as vast white wastes, barren of all life. Such impressions served varied purposes such as crafting an atmosphere for a text, enhancing the prestige of the challenge of exploration, and permitting colonial enterprises (itself a self-contradictory prospect, since if there was truly nothing there to be exploited, there would be no purpose in setting up shop).

Ultimately, the ‘blankness’ of the Ant/Arctic regions, to return to our original analogy, made them seem a work unfinished, perhaps never even begun in the first place; as though God or Nature, having exhausted their imaginative prowess in filling up the middle latitudes of the world, came to the poles and found themselves afflicted by permanent, crippling writer’s block. The challenge is picked up by writers instead: the Ant/Arctic provides that increasingly rarefied opportunity, the geographic blank space. Not all writers of polar fiction take up the challenge of populating that void with similar concern for the plausibility of their scenarios, it should be noted, but many do show a desire for a certain degree of verisimilitude or scientific sanction.

The vast majority of critical works and secondary literature this project draws upon relate either to the specific texts above or to specific data or themes raised by the analysis. The idea of “Ant/Arctic Studies” remains, for the most part, as blank as the regions in question. However, there are signs that more scholars are beginning to interest themselves in the notion of Arctic and Antarctic narratives as a kind of regional literature, albeit one which is, by definition, not native but projected. One important antecedent in this emergent scholarly field is

² James McKusick notes the origins in contemporary ecological science of the various creatures that surround and attach themselves to the vessel of Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner” as it drifts through the glacial waters of far southern latitudes (213).

Eric Wilson's *The Spiritual History of Ice*, published in 2003, an examination of the role this substance has played in the imagination of the Romantics, including a lengthy chapter on the poles. Wilson is not used much in this project, because of his emphasis on shorter forms, and because he is largely concerned with aesthetic considerations rather than this project's more sociological emphasis, but Wilson nonetheless demonstrates how a wintry theme can be used to organize broad-scoped criticism. The most important piece of critical literature for this project is Jen Hill's *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination*, published in 2008. This book features a particular emphasis on sociological dimensions such as imperialism, including components on the fabrication of race and gender. In addition to being an invaluable tome of knowledge on both the primary sources and the subsequent critical literature, Hill inspired this project to examine in greater detail the way these polar narratives function in a societal and ideological context. This project builds atop Hill's own scholarship by expanding the field of concern to Antarctic settings and authors from the other side of the Atlantic, although it evidently cannot replicate the thoroughness with which Hill investigates the multiple forms of Arctic fiction in her chosen area. This project also adopts what is (in this writer's opinion) an original take on questions of race and gender. Previous scholarship investigates, in depth, how these texts deploy racial and gender discrimination onto the figure of the Other, or examines how racial and gender ideologies are constructed (as, for instance, Hill's examination of the masculinity-enhancing character of the Arctic). This project, it turn, identifies and analyses the way polar narratives turn those ideologies and hierarchies back onto the figure of the white male explorer to destabilize such categories and warn against the consequences of ideological extremes.

The project focuses on six works in this period (five novels and one play) that engage imaginatively with the Arctic or Antarctic in this period. Chronologically, they are *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1818), *Symzonia* by 'Adam Seaborn' (1820), *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* by Edgar Allan Poe (1838), *The Frozen Deep* written by Wilkie Collins and rewritten (and

performed) by Charles Dickens (1857), *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* by James De Mille (published in 1888, though likely written in the 1860s [De Mille xxiii]), and *The Purple Cloud* by M.P. Shiel (1901). This list is by no means an exhaustive survey of Ant/Arctic literature during the nineteenth century, a field whose scope quite surprised this researcher; other works may be mentioned when relevant. These specific works have been selected to achieve as close to a representative sample as possible, given size constraints. They were, as listed above, written at various points across the breadth of the nineteenth century (and *Purple Cloud* just outside it, though still written in a Victorian mode). They are divided equally between works that deal with the North Pole (*Frankenstein*, *Frozen Deep*, *Purple Cloud*) and the South Pole (*Symzonia*, *Pym*, *Strange Manuscript*). The nationalities of the authors³ are divided equally across the Atlantic, featuring three British writers (Shelley, the Dickens/Collins team, and Shiel), and two American (Seaborn, Poe) and one Canadian (De Mille). Likewise, the authors are equally divided between well-known, canonical figures (Shelley, Poe, Dickens/Collins) and writers of less enduring reputation (Seaborn, De Mille, Shiel).⁴ There are aspects on which the selection is not so equitable—only one female author, for instance—but I trust this sampling nonetheless aptly characterizes the kind of polar literature produced over the course of the century.

These are, deliberately, all works of fiction. From the late eighteenth century onwards, memoirs and dramatizations of actual Arctic and Antarctic expeditions were quite popular and were key to furthering interest in the exploration of these regions—which, in turn, no doubt influenced the authors above to set their works of fiction in these regions. This project does not include this kind of polar non-fiction (or dramatization) in its scope, not because it dismisses the importance of these first-hand accounts, but because of the specific

³ Out of concern for size and manageability, this project restricts itself to English-language authors, though polar texts were being written elsewhere, of course. Jules Verne's *Le Sphinx Des Glaces* is one example which shall be relevant to this project.

⁴ Although one should mention, as a caveat, that neither *Pym* nor *Frozen Deep* are these authors' best known works. At the outset, this project had intended to examine the potential differences in representation of the Ant/Arctic between these two groups. However, I discovered surprising consistency across these texts in their depictions of polar regions. Whatever differences in quality and reception between these texts, they have little to do with the way their setting is portrayed.

interest in understanding how authors *imagined* the Ant/Arctic, settings constructed rather than reported, and the ideology that underlies the creative act. This project also chose not to include amongst primary texts polar poetry such as was produced by Samuel Coleridge or Eleanor Porden, owing to size constraints and a desire for a similar form—long prose—on which to base comparisons, although poetry is referred to when relevant.

MANY DIFFERENT WORDS FOR SNOW: A NOTE ON GENRE

There is a famous misconception that Inuit peoples have dozens (or more) different words to designate varieties of snow. Though the error was based on a misunderstanding of the way Inuit language functioned, and a less than careful delineation of linguistic groups in the Arctic, the impression entered popular conception as an exemplar of how specialization gives rise to lexicons uniquely crafted for that field, to define and divide to ever greater precision (or narrowness). The proliferation of genres as categories in the arts, and literary studies specifically, is one such outgrowth of expert vocabulary. Rarely is this truer than for the field of writing called (sometimes, contentiously) speculative fiction (and are, indeed, sometimes grouped as ‘genre fiction’) whose broad vistas of imaginative play seems to produce a concomitant, paradoxical need for relentless self-categorization. Genres considered ‘speculative’ spawn long lists of sub-genres within themselves, sometimes those sub-genres will blossom with internal categories of their own (for instance, the many period-specific permutations of cyberpunk). And like ‘varieties’ of snow, the distinctions between these categories and hierarchies within them often shift depending on one’s subjective outlook, always far easier to define in the abstract than in practice, as any given “category has a clear center but boundaries that shade off imperceptibly, so that a book on the fringes” may or may not belong depending on the observer (Attebery, as quoted in Morgan 266). And uncommon indeed is the work of speculative fiction that belongs clearly and wholly to the theoretical center; a patchwork of interests is more common, such that categorizations of genre are better suited to the Venn diagram than the spectrum.

Despite these attendant vagaries, genre remains nonetheless a very useful tool for conceptualization, enabling comparisons and contrasts on key thematic points across a body of literature—such as the multiple, related yet different works here considered. The nineteenth century was a period of both generic innovation and codification (and subsequent innovation as writers sought to break those emergent boundaries), particularly where speculative fiction is concerned, when early examples and/or seminal, defining works in horror, fantasy and science-fiction⁵ make their appearance. In particular, this paper considers that many of the texts scrutinized here were written in a period of generic transformation concerning the narrative trope of the ‘new land’ and the unknown locales that function as setting for speculative fiction—one where the Arctic and Antarctic function as stepping stones between the strange islands of earlier utopian and travel-adventure writings, and the more remote locales explored by protagonists of science-fiction. As such, it is useful to consider briefly the generic affiliations of these texts.

Frankenstein, of course, is a generic landmark; whether that landmark is as the first true work of science-fiction, and/or the seminal entry in the field of the Gothic. Calling *Frankenstein* gothic seems practically axiomatic,⁶ and generally, if “*Frankenstein* is not always classified as a Gothic novel,” it is because “it is often classified as science-fiction” instead (Halberstam 28)—though these need not be exclusive categories. Brian Aldiss, in one of the earliest and still pivotal cases for considering *Frankenstein* as the first true science-fiction novel, points out that “science-fiction springs [from] the Gothic novel,” and specifies, in his definition of the science-fiction genre, that it operates in a “characteristically ... Gothic or post-Gothic mode” (26). And by the time Aldiss revised his original survey of the history of science-fiction, it has become “a Stone Age truth to say that SF began with Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*” (Aldiss 18). The literary

⁵ Not only do we have trouble defining specifics of genre, but their very appellation can be contentious, as various terms have been offered for ‘science-fiction,’ ‘science fiction,’ ‘Sci-fi,’ or ‘SF.’ This paper uses ‘science-fiction’ for clarity of expression, without prejudice for the other variants.

⁶ Even those who might claim that “*Frankenstein* is not a gothic novel,” as Nilanjana Gupta does in her introduction to the Longman Study Edition, must admit “it incorporates (...) elements of Gothic fiction” (Gupta xxi).

importance, and sensational impact, of the Gothic and science-fiction in this text often obscures the fact that *Frankenstein*, both novel and restless protagonist, are inveterate voyagers. Though not as concerned with ocean-going journeys⁷ as most of our other texts (despite beginning and ending aboard a ship in the far north) Theresa Dobson and Rebecca Luce-Kapler claim that *Frankenstein* “is above all a travel tale that transports readers through a range of landscapes” (267); a tad hyperbolic, but the sentiment is well taken.

Symzonia casts its generic net wide. Burton Pollin calls *Symzonia* a “fantasy novel,” (102) while G. R. Thompson characterizes it as “a futuristic fantasy,” (Poe 430) which is almost a way of saying science-fiction without actually doing so. While the novel has undoubtedly fantastic elements, calling it a fantasy misses the main thrusts of the work, and may signal a retroactive bias in evaluating genre⁸. Modern readers, of course, know that the pole isn’t remotely as Seaborn describes it, let alone an Inner World, and so it appears little different than a heavy-handed, ocean-borne fairy tale. However, while the geographical hypothesis the book is based on “struck many [contemporaries] as not only improbable but laughable ... it had its adherents,” possibly including Poe (Poe 430).⁹ Others are less reluctant in characterizing *Symzonia* as science-fictional; Everett Bleiler includes it in his compendium of early science-fiction, as does David Seed. I would strongly echo such an affiliation. Whether it was meant to be taken seriously or not, *Symzonia* goes to great lengths to couch its voyage in the language of science, with lengthy discussions of optics and geography, new technologies such as airships, and considers the social consequences of such

⁷ There seems to be no agreement about what to call ocean-going exploration narratives, complicated by the fact that some tales are realist and others quite ‘imaginary’. This paper adopts no particular usage, and trusts the reader will understand what is meant by references to ‘travel literature,’ ‘sea adventure,’ ‘Voyages and Travel,’ etc.

⁸ It might be the case that, as Poe scholars, Pollin and Thompson are more readily predisposed to highlight the sensation and potential occultism of the work, rather than its framework of scientific justification.

⁹ Poe backed the proposal of an American naval officer seeking funds for an Antarctic expedition partially aimed at finding the hole in the pole (Poe 430), and wrote of a balloonist who, overflying the ice, “record[ed] a concave depression at the North Pole” (in “Hans Pfaall,” Seed 76-77).

innovation. Even the self comes under investigation¹⁰, as contemporary humanity is speculated to be descended from exiles from Symzonia, having undergone a rapid, proto-Darwinian de-evolution. Seed goes on to say that *Symzonia* “combines two genres: the imaginary voyage and the utopia” (77). John Rieder considers *Symzonia* “predominantly satirical” with an emphasis on colonialist practices (36), but *Symzonia*’s satire is broad-ranging and often self-reflective, with targets ranging from the hollow earth hypothesis that inspired it to the credibility of the protagonist himself.

Poe’s *Pym* is probably the most generically slippery of the texts here considered; while critics might argue between a select few affiliations for other stories, it sometimes seems that every reader comes away from *Pym* with a different idea of what genre(s) the book belongs to. Joseph Ridgely probably best encapsulated the difficulties in an article justly entitled “Tragical-Mythical-Satirical-Hoaxical: Problems of Genre in *Pym*,” a survey of *Pym* criticisms up to the 70s. Ronald C. Harvey, performing a similar survey two decades on, reminds us that even then, “Ridgely found fourteen distinct genres for which [*Pym*] has been claimed, including verisimilar voyage narrative, picaresque, parody, *Bildungsroman*, burlesque, and ‘existentialist-absurdist reading,’ to name a few” (Harvey 102), while Harvey’s own more recent survey, and David Ketterer’s, have added to that roster everything from the Gothic to a form of proto-postmodernism¹¹. Some of these generic analyses most relevant to our purposes includes Bruce I. Weiner, who finds *Pym* sympathetic to the Gothic mode of sensation, particularly in the drowning, entombments and cannibalism that marks the early portion of the text (49-50), although the events on Tsalal (which include yet another entombment) have strong resonances of horror as well. Amongst other speculative genres, varying forms of fantasy have been ascribed to *Pym*; a kind of proto-pulp “strange adventure” tale, romance, or else a text with mythic and visionary concerns (Ketterer, *Tracing Shadows* 244-245, 258-265; Thompson

¹⁰ If we agree with Aldiss’ definition of science-fiction as “the search for a definition of mankind and his status in the universe” (25), *Symzonia* certainly provides: inferiority!

¹¹ This author refers interested readers to those sources for a full discussion of genre in *Pym*; the field is too expansive even to summarize here.

195-198).¹² Some critics have tried to place *Pym* in the literary history of science-fiction, albeit more for its influence on assured science-fiction authors like Verne (who would go on to write a sequel to *Pym*) than any generic features of its own (Aldiss 103)¹³. Many critics have sought in *Pym* social commentary, and this usually takes the form of commentary on race and slavery (a focus which might say as much about the critics as Poe), though there's little agreement on the author's presumed stance, as will be discussed later in Part II.

In contrast, since *The Frozen Deep* has no speculative elements, and so no great unknowns to classify, it is, generically, the most readily categorized. Robert Louis Brannan, in his edition of the text, calls it “an unconventional melodrama” from the outset, and it only earns the modifier after Dickens’ revisions to Wilkie Collins’ original script (4, 34). Jen Hill echoes the moniker, adding that *The Frozen Deep* is an example of how “melodrama [is] at work in the evolution of the sensation novel,” linking the play to the genre in which Collins would become prolific (117). *The Frozen Deep* ties in, generically, with many of our other works, because “the ‘sensation’ produced by melodrama—the horror, the surprise, the *frisson* of seeing” is essentially the same sensation that our more conventional horror narratives seek to evoke in their readers (Hill 131). This is particularly true for the unstated undertones of cannibalism that run through the play; “[c]annibalism ... was a stock trope of melodrama by mid-century,” as well as “a staple” of “the ‘Voyages and Travels’ genre” which *The Frozen Deep* appeals to in its prologue and general subject (Hill 130). In so doing, it is allied in topicality, locale and sensation evoked, to other, more fantastical travel narratives featuring cannibalistic episodes—in our case, *Pym* and *Strange Manuscript*.

As regards this latter novel, Justin Edwards notes that “identifying the genre of De Mille’s text is a slippery business. It has been called, among other

¹² Such ‘mythic’ readings also include the religious: Richard Kopley has looked at *Pym* as Christian text, notable for the biblical allusions that arise particularly at the end of the book, and David H. Hirsch senses the coming of an apocalypse, Christian or otherwise, in Pym’s movement southwards (Ketterer, *Tracing Shadows* 265; Hirsch 141-150).

¹³ Where Aldiss feels that Poe pre-empted the sentiment rather than the structure of science-fiction in his work, Harold Beaver has made an extensive argument in favour of Poe’s inclusion amongst the early writers of speculative fiction—however, *Pym* is not viewed as one of the works in Poe’s copious corpus that significantly touches on science-fiction.

things, a utopian travel narrative with elements of science-fiction, a sentimental romance, social critique and gothic novel” (13-14).¹⁴ Edwards makes the case for the novel as operating in a Gothic mode, and notes that it enhances the horror of key passages in *Symzonia* and *Pym* (the passage into the earth, and the cannibal/native trope) (14). Malcolm Parks calls it “a romance of travel and adventure” (De Mille xxxix); it is also “an anti-utopian satire” (xxxix) and “largely parodic” (Rieder 37). Parks calls the speculative elements of *Strange Manuscript* “fantasy” (De Mille xli), and perhaps we again encounter a retroactive bias, as Parks himself extensively details, in his annotations, the contemporary scientific knowledge that De Mille draws upon to write the book—knowledge then foregrounded in the book itself by scientist characters. The protagonist Adam More’s tale alone, whatever science lurked in the background, would seem like a more straight-up fantasy, but the scientific justifications for what More encounters provided by the readers in the frame ground the novel more solidly in the epistemology of science-fiction. Many other critics have been more willing than Parks to call it such (including but not limited to Bleiler, Rieder and Seed); Ketterer goes so far as to call it “as much an originator of Canadian SF as *Frankenstein* is of world SF” (*Canadian* 12).

The Purple Cloud, rather than being made up of a multiplicity of potential genres, is instead polarized between a select few. Brian Stableford terms it “primarily a religious fantasy” for its apocalyptic plot and Christian resonances (39). He concedes, however, that “those who have hailed *The Purple Cloud* as a classic of science-fiction are not wrong,” though his attempts to reconcile the generic gap tend towards the cultic (39). The generic division of a novel “as much a theological fantasy as a scientific romance” (Stableford 45) is most thoroughly examined by Monique Morgan, who finds that the book’s “generic hybridity ... as a mixture of science-fiction and fantasy” permits readers to arrive at “two different resolutions to the generic tension within science fantasy,” largely

¹⁴ As Ketterer reminds us, the characters in the frame themselves debate the Manuscript’s generic affiliations, offering “sensational novel,” “satirical romance” and “scientific romance” as possibilities—though one believes there to be “precious little science in it,” and another is too dense to spot the satire (Ketterer, *Canadian* 10-11; De Mille 226).

dependent on whether they consider the narrator reliable or unreliable (Morgan 266, 278). Morgan ultimately suggests that this “tension between the supernatural and the scientific” may not be possible to resolve, but does signal a preference for science-fiction insofar as the question, to her, is whether it is “predominantly a work of science-fiction or a shifting amalgam of sf and fantasy that settles, finally, on the fantasy side” (274). This paper interests itself in the novel primarily as a work of science-fiction, and its consideration of the book’s religious elements are treated more as cultural artefact than explicative frame. Owing to its apocalyptic plot, and the foregrounding of madness and death, *Purple Cloud* is also very much a horror story, and David G. Hartwell characterizes it as “one of the few Poesque science-fiction novels” (as quoted in Aldiss 146).

What is the upshot? We have here a selection of imaginative works that, between them, cover a broad range of genres, yet all eventually turn to the Arctic and Antarctic in order to best articulate their stories. Many of these works have influenced each other, sometimes overtly (*Symzonia* → *Pym* → *Strange Manuscript* are seen to build on each other), or else generically (Poe’s debt to the gothic, and influence in turn on science-fiction writers like Verne and Shiel). Thematically, they intersect at multiple points, which together form the tropes of what might be called the Ant/Arctic fiction of the nineteenth century. However, notwithstanding specific instances like the one detailed above, the temptation to linearity must be resisted. The correlation of travel narratives with the emergence of science-fiction is too great to be dismissed as coincidence, and is a logical progression besides, but ‘progression’ masks what is really a literary milieu which was extracted from and added to according to one’s interests; so, *Pym* following on *Symzonia* is less of a work of science-fiction than its antecedent, yet De Mille’s interest in Poe’s *Narrative* produced a south polar journey that returned to a strongly science-fictional *logos*. Shiel’s protagonist Adam Jeffson completes the trek that Shelley’s Robert Walton abandoned, and fulfills the latter’s apocalyptic promise, but it also turns the religious analogy of *Frankenstein* into, potentially, a reality in this fictional world, tilting more strongly towards fantasy. Indeed, fantasy and science-fiction are two sides of the same coin in this body of works,

often turning less on an epistemology by which the narrative justifies itself and more on the perspective of the reader. Where this project relies on a geographic conceit to investigate sociological interests, it naturally favours science-fiction, but will not overlook the religious dimension of these stories. Features common to all texts, like travel and horror/sensation, inevitably produce a number of shared interests, such as cannibalism, which will be investigated in the coming pages. The distances involved—both literal and literary—enable these texts to examine the societies from which they emerge with a critical eye, directly or through satire, including the major divisions of humanity which western culture has conceived, the notions of race and gender.

The first part of this project details the way polar exploration has become gendered, and the poles themselves sexed. The North Pole is generally writ as masculine, and polar fiction highlights the way this hyper-masculinity undermines the masculinity of explorers. In contrast, the South Pole is sexed female, an outlook present in its very (fictional) geography, and how this great female presence overwhelms the masculine. Several texts present masculinity, when pushed to the extreme, as a dangerous and even apocalyptic phenomenon.

The second part examines race, and details the way habitual notions of such are brought into question in polar narratives. In one scenario, the ‘natives’ turn out to be far whiter than the European, with the result that protagonists are ‘downgraded’ within their own hierarchy. Explorers sometimes encounter ideologies where their whiteness is denied altogether. And in some circumstances the very primacy of light(-skinned) over dark is inverted. In these texts, both protagonists and populations can become Orientalized, and, like absolute masculinity, absolute whiteness becomes self-destructive.

The third part studies some narrative techniques common to these texts, used in order to increase the uncertainty present within their own stories, and thus bringing their doubts about race and gender into question in turn. These tactics include nested narratives and metafictional frames, rewriting, and omission. In conclusion, the role of doubt in these stories, and its potential for productiveness, is briefly discussed.

PART I: TOPS AND BOTTOMS:
GENDERED LANDSCAPE AND MASCULINE PERILS

The very word ‘polar’ carries related meanings. The readily identifiable and perfectly opposed extremities of geographies at the top and bottom of the world, a schema confirmed as more than a trick of mapmakers by the attraction and repulsion of magnets on a compass, grounds this bi-‘polar’ view of the world in nature, a dyad as seemingly intrinsic to unmediated reality as the Manichean dichotomy of night and day. ‘Polar’ thus naturally summons the idea of binaries, and polar narratives an ideal realm to define and contest the limits of these divisions. One such split, we will examine in the next chapter, is between the (European) self and the racial Other. But whereas, depending on the supposedly scientific schema used, race was a multifarious concept, comprised of many, disagreed-upon categories simply grouped into an ‘us versus them’ paradigm for imperialist convenience, the writers and literary audience of the nineteenth century (and, indeed, most of human history) had a far more obvious, practically undeniable split right at home: the division of humanity, in near-perfect proportion, into the two biological/cultural sects of man and woman.

Venturing into the fraught field of gender criticism can sometimes appear as perilous as Arctic exploration itself; the contention over terminology has produced as many different variations on what sex and gender mean as if caught in the refractive icescape of a glacier, distorted reflections of an uncertain reality projected prismatically onto these many surfaces. This study does not dare attempt to provide a new definition for these terms; rather, they are defined here as conventional, without implicitly accepting or denying the potential problems therein. So ‘sex’ refers to the biological status of a person, the chromosomes they bear; the dichotomy is one of ‘male’ and ‘female’ (keeping in mind the possibility of intersex biology). ‘Gender’ will refer to the baggage of culturally-defined norms of behaviour which are superimposed onto sex, specifically those embraced by the Anglo-Saxon cultures of Britain, the United States and Canada at this time—and acknowledged as constructs, since it will be possible to observe

the way polar environments are used to create and dismantle the categories of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine.’

In examining texts dealing with polar explorations, critics such as Jen Hill have identified a gendered superimposition onto the Arctic landscape that seeks to cast the North Pole and the surrounding regions as masculine, and (it is hoped by many who venture there) masculinising—though as will be seen, the extremity of the pole’s ‘manliness’ can produce the obverse effect, feminizing the male explorer protagonist because they cannot compete with such hyper-masculinity, and in the effects the environment has on the male body. Narratives dealing with the South Pole, in contrast, adopt a more typical gendered narrative of exploration that casts the regions subjected to the explorers’ presence and scrutiny in a feminine role, highlighted by geography that impersonates female biology. These narratives, however, are not without their own variety of emasculation through impotence—not before the landscape, this time, but before particular populations. The texts adopt a habitual view that links the feminine principle with fertility, and the masculine with infertility. The latter is then used to critique the aim of masculine ambitions—in linked fields of exploration and science—as perilous in eliminating the productive difference that the female half represents, pointing towards—and fulfilling, in the case of Shiel—the destructive consequences and entropic infertility of a world entirely sexed male. Connections to female characters and feminine principles are the eventual salvation of males from their literal and metaphorical polar prisons.

The phenomenon of sexed or gendered landscape is hardly unique to the polar regions or the nineteenth century; critics have long observed the way Western natural philosophy, in particular, has rendered the natural world as feminine, attendant to the longstanding association of women and the environment with characteristics of fertility, the site of instinct, and passivity before use and ownership by ‘cultural’ males (cf. Dobson & Luce-Kapler 267). This becomes all the more evident with the concomitant rise in geographic exploration and scientific pursuits; we need only note the sexualized language in Victor Frankenstein’s scientific longing to “penetrate the secrets of nature”

(Shelley 41), terminology echoed by his Ingolstadt professors, or the determination by explorers literary and otherwise to seek ‘virgin’ lands—a sexualisation which will be outlined further with respect to the South Pole and its imagined geographies. Curiously, however, in defiance of its southern partner and of the received tradition of the natural environment as female—particularly the supposedly pristine and unblemished environments not yet ‘discovered’ by the European—the North Pole and the Arctic region surrounding finds itself gendered in masculine terms.

NORTH: THE MOST MASCULINE ENVIRONMENT

The unusual assignation of male character to the Arctic predates—though not by much—the nineteenth century and is attested to in the non-fiction literature available on the Arctic, according to the critic Jen Hill: “the rigor of male-only Arctic expeditions articulated a masculinity positioned in opposition [...] to women at home and to upper-class male dandies in the metropole” (6). Arctic voyagers were, or became through the experience, ‘real’ men, as demonstrated in the biographies of British heroes and models of masculinity such as Lord Nelson, whose character was supposedly forged by his experiences aboard the *HMS Carcass*, part of a failed expedition to discover a northwest passage, subsequently dramatized by Robert Southey’s *Life of Nelson* (Hill 32-40). Exploration, broadly speaking, was often seen as a way to build the male character; but the polar regions stand in a category of their own as domains of inherent masculinity, qualities which can then be transferred to those to make the difficult journey and sojourn there. In Lord Nelson’s case, the narrative of his youth “establishes the hero of Trafalgar’s national masculinity as being Arctic in origin;” (Hill 25) the Arctic functions as a kind of storehouse of masculine values, which, through exposure, are inculcated into the traveller.

Wilderness, generally, was seen as means of inculcating, or restoring, lost masculinity, “a source of national virility and toughness” that combated the decadence of cities, factory-labour and “the weary routine of business and social life at home” (Bloom 32). Nowhere was this more true than for the poles, which

functioned as “male testing grounds”—testing for masculinity, but themselves ‘male’—because they were “exceptionally cold, dark, barren landscapes on which could be written a hypermasculinized conquest” (Morin). The use of the term ‘hypermasculine’ here is telling: if the conquest of the male explorer or adventurer over a typical wilderness—writ as the feminine, possibly virginal landscape—is a feat of masculinity, a demonstration of virility (Bloom 32, 34), the act of polar exploration becomes superlatively male because the environment being overcome is, itself, already masculine. It is not the conquest of masculinity over femininity, but masculinity over the already masculine.

The climate and character of the Arctic—cold, hard, barren—married well with the qualities that Western men, particularly Anglo-Saxon men, attributed to themselves. Like the climate, they saw themselves as coldly rational and stoic before the wild, expressive emotivity of their female counterparts. Likewise, the Arctic and male self-conceptions are imbued with physical permanency and consistent character, as opposed to the changeable moods of women—even the cycle of day and night is prolonged to half-a-year in the Arctic. Finally, there is a lack of fertility (at least on the surface), an inability to generate life within itself, as female bodies and verdant climes can¹; characteristic of dubious merit to which we shall return at the end of this chapter. In *Frankenstein*, arctic explorer Robert Walton engages in a project of masculinising himself which involves “inuring my body to hardship (...) I voluntarily endured cold, famine, thirst, and want of sleep,” (Shelley 17) a process of mortification meant to transform soft, vulnerable flesh into something as hard and senseless as the ice that surrounds him. To this bodily transformation is joined “the study of mathematics, the theory of medicine, and those branches of physical science” best suited to his goals—what is often known as the *hard* sciences, in other words, and professionally filled by men. This is a mental shift away from the poetry of his schoolboy days, now abandoned;

¹ Berthold Schoene-Harwood attributes the motivations of the men in *Frankenstein* in part to ‘womb envy,’ this phenomenon by which men recognize “the awesome superiority of ... woman’s natural creativity” through motherhood (*Writing Men* 13). To call men ‘infertile’ as we do here is not to say they are incapable of reproduction, but to recognize that the majority of the process occurs outside of themselves.

Walton has reneged on his *creative* abilities² in favour of the masculine project of revelation through penetration, discovery. Frankenstein's own unceasingly northwards journey of revenge is remarkably active compared to the passivity that marks his character throughout most of his narrative; as though the destruction of his domestic sphere has also burned away his femininity (in part; his gender status even now is ambiguous, as will be seen), and girded him to endure months of suffering and hardship.

There is a metaphorical aptness to the Arctic as male domain: being uppermost in conventional representations, it is the figurative "head of this planet" (Shiel 6), and as such accords well with men who like to see themselves as the heads of households, ships, nations—a geographic patriarch. Too, the 'head' implies intellectual considerations, the purely scientific sphere of a region purified by the clarity of ice and snow, as opposed to the vegetative muddle of more southern regions. In *Frankenstein*, Geneva is the geographic 'heart' of the tale, the site of affection to which the narrative keeps returning, but it is ever northwards, to the 'head', that Victor wishes to go, in order to exercise his masculinity through his intellect (Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 13; Dobson & Luce-Kapler 267).

Polar exploration is also the most removed from the domestic sphere, and its feminine implications; if men, concerned with their own manliness, flocked to wilderness to escape "social life at home" (Bloom 32), nowhere was home more distant. This functioned at both individual and societal levels. As British, and then American, explorers pushed the boundaries of their nations, women inevitably followed to colonize the new lands, or accompanying the cadre of male colonial administrators. Female presence was often troubling; as Laura Ann Stoler reminds us, local women threatened masculine duty and loyalties through sex, while imported women worried colonial males who were concerned with keeping them segregated to preserve their character (12-15, 17-20). By contrast, the Arctic

² Such creativity exercises, if not intrinsically feminine, can nonetheless be seen as an attempt to "emulate woman's natural creativity by dint of [man's] imagination and intellect" (Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 13). In Walton's case, the potentially feminine passivity of artistic creation is abandoned for the active role of the explorer.

“answered threats of effeminacy, miscegenation, and vulnerability to physical, psychological and moral weakness associated with Britain’s tropical colonies” (Hill 6); there were no opportunities for indolence, laziness was fatal, and best of all the “exclusion of women” meant there was nothing to compromise masculine endeavour and comradeship (Hill 56). This perception demands that we ‘forget’ about Inuit women³, and, as will be discussed, polar fiction was less hesitant to include women, though never as far north as men. Nonetheless, the popular view of the Arctic was one stripped of any feminine presence—a masculine setting.

At the national level, the Arctic could also erase “troubling moral questions raised by domestic economic reliance on slavery and other forms of colonial exploitation” by being so empty, without (obvious) economic motive to trouble the ideological narrative of the “‘pure’ scientific and geographic curiosity” and test of character (Hill 6, 8). Journalist Henry Morley, writing in Dickens’ *Household Words*, claimed “[t]he history of Arctic enterprise is stainless as the Arctic snows, clean to the core as an ice mountain” (as quoted in Hill 8). Though Nelson’s participation in the search for a northwest passage, and the shipping lines it would produce, point to the fact that even supposedly desolate landscapes were not immune to the profit motive, “[b]y the nineteenth century, hope of any fast route to China [...] was gone, and thus the Arctic stood outside of the economic relations that defined Great Britain’s relationship with colonial spaces” (Hill 8). This is an attitude best demonstrated by Wilkie Collins’ idealized expedition sailors, where no economic motive is ever mentioned, and indeed barely a heroic motive too; it is simply natural, in this play, for men to want to test the limits of their character and human endeavour through Arctic expeditions. Robert Walton’s quest to discover a passage through the pole itself, let alone a more southerly parallel pass, may seem anachronistic in this light (although *Frankenstein*’s dating has always proved problematic, owing to the eighteenth-century date on Walton’s letters and his familiarity with Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*, as Mary Thornburg reminds us [73]); though Walton himself sees the

³ One of the first white women to accompany a team of Arctic explorers was Robert Peary’s wife, who was none too pleased to discover that her husband had found himself a mistress amongst the Inuit (Bloom 41-42).

goal of the voyage as yielding an “inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all *mankind* to the last generation” (Shelley 16; emphasis mine), a discovery that could have economic benefits, but is primarily pursued for the permanent advancement of a masculine field of knowledge (such as a better understanding of magnetism). This sublimated profit motive returns with force in *The Purple Cloud*, where “the scientific interest which men had felt in this unknown region was now, suddenly, a thousand times intensified by a new interest—a *money* interest”—to wit, a sum of “175 million dollars to the man (...) who first reached the Pole” (Shiel 4; original emphasis). And yet, though Jeffson’s expedition races to collect the prize, the money is, itself, proffered posthumously by a kind of late-nineteenth-century Howard Hughes, to no other purpose, economic or otherwise, than to see the goal fulfilled. The prize can be seen as literalizing the cultural capital that Walton, Adam Seaborn and other explorers believed would accrue from the fame of their discoveries.

As mentioned, the Arctic’s distance from the homestead could be used to perform collective, national masculinity (cf. Hill 25); however, it was also a way for the individual male protagonist to escape “the feminine, the domestic, the maternal”, what Schoene-Harwood calls “*domophobic* escape routes” (15; original emphasis). As mentioned, nautical adventures generally were seen as a way of teaching masculinity, a rite of passage; such is the goal of schoolboys Pym and Augustus in Poe’s *Pym*, who come into their manhood through an escapade aboard the storm-tossed sailboat *Ariel*, complete with imagery of underworld journey and rebirth. Later in life, Pym smuggles himself aboard the *Grampus* to escape the domestic sphere of his youth and forge an independent existence as a sailor. The domestic sphere is conventionally feminine, and one of the few fleeting references to women in *Pym* (other than the female-gendered ships) is Pym’s “mother [who] went into hysterics at the bare mention” of his embarking upon a whaling voyage; his grandfather likewise forbids the attempt, and his father, though he has “no direct opposition,” is unwilling to defy the others (Poe 441). For Pym, the journey that eventually leads to the South Pole is a way of escaping the overprotective mothering of the household, and the bad examples of

masculinity represented by the aged, depleted grandfather who stands in the way of manly pursuits, and the ineffectual father, emasculated by his wife and infantilized by his continued dependence on his own father.

This impulse is also reflected in *Frankenstein's* Arctic explorer Robert Walton: though older and more experienced at sea than Pym, his quest to the North Pole is undertaken against the explicit, dying wishes of his father (feminized by his illness⁴), and the “evil forebodings” (Shelley 15) of the sister who raised him in lieu of a mother. Amongst his other motivations, Walton sees the Arctic as the site where he can finally complete the delayed transition from boyhood to manhood (Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 14), leaving behind childhood family figures or aesthete pursuits like his failed poetry in favour of the icy forge of the far north. On his return, he will be able to claim an existence independent from the domestic sphere of his childhood through his fame as the discoverer of a northern passageway. The need to forge an independent (masculine) identity in this fashion is partly determined by genre. Mary Thornburg sees in the hero of sentimental romances of the period a stage of “excessive masculinity,” where manly qualities such as being “open, passionate, sensual, active, reasonable, strong” are unmediated by feminine influence—in other words, when he finds himself between mother and wife (31). This period of dangerous masculinity is eventually ended by marriage, and he acquires his independence from his childhood domesticity by assuming the leadership of a new familial unit of his own. But the hero of an adventure-based novel, to which genre these travelogues belong to varying degrees, must have mobility unfettered by domestic attachments, and as such are almost always pre-familial (or, exceptionally, post-familial, as with the aged Allan Quatermain’s dead wives and son). For these protagonists, manly freedom comes through achievement in masculine fields of science and exploration.

⁴ Gilman points out that medical discourse in the nineteenth century tended to create another gendered polarity “between the most masculine (healthy) and the most feminine (ill)” (215). This “*feminisme* of the male through the effects of ... disease” also correlated with infantilism, as the very ill “male [patient] returns to the level of the ‘sexless’ child” in his infirmity and need to be cared for (Gilman 215).

This is a central conflict animating Victor Frankenstein's psyche—to be the husband his mother, father and sister/cousin/fiancée want him to be, or to “flee from the horror vision of ... domestic entrapment” (Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 11), to escape the uncanny duplications and incestuous overtones of the familial unit and find a new existence outside the domestic sphere as a renowned scientist; the sentimental male hero, or the adventuresome male hero. His contacts with the domestic sphere, the bad femininity of the reduplicated mother, sister and lover in Caroline and Elizabeth, and the bad masculinity of his impotent father⁵, lead him to travel ever further away from his childhood homestead (14-15), first to Ingolstadt, then the barren Orkneys, and finally into the Arctic. Even at home, he seeks his peace not in the home, but in the miniature Arctic of the “unstained snowy mountain-top” and the “sublime ecstasy” of the glaciers in the mountains nearby, an environment linked to his masculine project of discovery, as he proposes to “penetrate [the] misty veil” of the summits, language sexualized not only for the act of penetration, but also by ‘veil,’ (the feminine cloth linked to concealed female sexuality) (Shelley 99-100). Frankenstein's unwillingness to be the domestic hero his family wants him to be is reflected in his odd inaction as the Monster gradually depopulates his domestic sphere; Frankenstein passes from pre-familial to post-familial almost instantly in the murder of his newlywed wife and death of his father, freeing him from domestic responsibilities only just assumed to pursue a manly agenda of revenge into the far north. Adam Jeffson of *The Purple Cloud*, in many ways a more successful, and thus more tragic, literary double of Walton and Victor (themselves typically read as doubles), is also affianced when his story begins, on the verge of entering into domesticity. But his betrothed the Countess Clodagh represents the

⁵ Alphonse Frankenstein's masculinity is debatable. In *Writing Men*, Schoene-Harwood considers Alphonse a “realization of the masculine ideal,” a person “who feel[s] secure enough in [his] masculinity to display feelings of domestic affection” and “seem perfectly balanced in [his] manliness which incorporates rather than categorically excludes the feminine” (16). However, this critic is more inclined to agree with Thornburg that Alphonse is “in his private, domestic life ... a weak figure, dominated by his wife until her death” (108). If nothing else, it seems likely that Victor's phobia of the domestic emerges from the way his father “retires from [the masculine sphere] to give himself up to the [feminine sphere],” with the result that “[h]is masculinity [is] exhausted” (Thornburg 107-108).

worst kind of literary woman: domineering, filled with unwomanly ambition, and a murderess—made all the worse by the fact that her victim is her own nephew, a betrayal of familial ties that well communicates her unsuitability as mistress of any domestic unit. Jeffson's journey is both arranged by and an escape from the bad female figure; and Jeffson, like Frankenstein, winds up being the indirect assassin of this family, first in his silence as his future relation is poisoned, and then in his belief that he has triggered the cloud that kills (along with everybody else) his fiancée.

The identification between the Arctic and transferable, masculine values was the case, Hill suggests, even when the narratives seemed to imply a less than ideally manly reaction on the part of the sailors to the harsh weather, to say nothing of starvation and disease; the enervation, if not outright emasculation, experienced by these crews are overlooked or minimized into just another obstacle for the brave English explorer to overcome. The bodily and mental consequences of Arctic exploration were sometimes overlooked, a convenient forgetting which allowed the explorers to retain their manliness (much as the convenient forgetting of the Inuit enabled the supposed empty purity of the Arctic). They could also be re-inscribed into a masculine narrative; certainly, being replete with challenges made the experience of Arctic voyaging seem a courageous venture, thus affirming masculine virtues. Collins and Dickens participate in such re-writing in *The Frozen Deep*, where the stranded Arctic explorers accept their own suffering and the death of their comrades with stiff upper lip worthy of Blitz-era mythic Englishness; officers and crewmen continue to tend to their duties even in this extremity, and the only character who grouses about their situation—the cook, John Want—does so for comic effect. Potential physical degradation becomes just another test of character.

In *The Frozen Deep*, the moral weakness often seen to stalk tropical colonialists is aptly transmuted from unmanly behaviour like surrender and despair (and nary a thought of inhumane behaviour like cannibalism) into a conflict between two rivals for the affection of the same woman, an appropriately manly site of contestation eventually resolved through homosocial comradeship

inspired by the mutual struggle against the environment. Homosociality is, of course, a key aspect of the transition to manhood offered by nautical journeys, and polar narratives are no exception—*The Frozen Deep* doubly so, as the first act takes place in a cottage populated only by females (mainly relatives of the missing sailors), and the second the all-male cast of the stranded explorers. Walton's longing for a male friend of similar temperament to himself is provided by the Arctic, when he happens upon the freezing Victor Frankenstein (and Victor himself finds in Walton a kind of replacement for his particular friendship with Henry Clerval). The terrible consequences of Jefferson's polar journey seem to be foreshadowed in his violation of homosocial norms on the journey; instead of bonding with his partners, he becomes responsible for their deaths (to varying degrees of culpability), and his inability to become part of the (male) social unit is ironically rewarded by becoming the last man on Earth. It should be noted, however, that while homosociality can reinforce the masculine character of the Arctic, it should not be seen as a cause; the south polar narratives too featured this kind of male camaraderie—bordering on the homoerotic in *Pym*—but does not create a masculine environment beyond the male sphere of the sailing ship.

There is one notable exception to this masculine view of the Arctic, and that is Eleanor Anne Porden's *The Veils; or the Triumph of Constancy*. Porden, the first wife of John Franklin, was rather familiar with the subject of the Arctic, and had previously dramatized her husband's adventures in *The Arctic Expeditions*, in which Hill recognizes "that the act of making Arctic geography legible is male"; the poem itself is full of exhortations of masculine courage and scientific pursuits (Hill 69). *The Veils*, however, features a group of three women—a new sorority—who, having had their veils stolen, proceed to the next logical step of abjuring feminine passivity and embarking on a quest for both the ravished garments and their knightly suitors already on the search. The search leads both men and women to a fantastical Arctic where the darkness and infertility of the winter months suddenly erupts into flowers during the summer. The knight Alfred finds himself incapable of coping with the environment, borne passively on the floes, and must be rescued first from a serpent (an animal who

evokes Eve and female perils) by a sea nymph, Marguerite, and then from a prison at the bottom of the polar sea by Miranda, the lady for whom he had embarked on this quest. There is, here, a clear reversal of typical romance gender roles; and where most texts present an all-male Arctic, this is one where men fail to navigate the environment—it is rather women who are empowered as polar travelers. Notable is the method by which Alfred enters the undersea realm in which he will become trapped:

Marguerite (...) midwives the ship into the underworld through the vortex of the Maëlstrom at the North Pole. The Maëlstrom is gendered female like Charybdis (to which Porden compares it) and its mechanics are a sort of monstrous birth that, instead of delivering Alfred into the world, draw him into a literally suffocating underwater fantasy. (Hill 76)

As does Margaret Cavendish, Porden sets a gateway in the Arctic, only instead of an airy portal to utopia, this Arctic landscape is sexed female, with a vortex that evokes devouring female genitals leading into a dark, watery—and thus womb-like, in a negative sense—prison. Hill terms it a “monstrous birth” (76), but it is really a type of unbirthing, with Alfred swallowed back into feminine, natural world from which cultivated masculinity was meant to emerge. This sexual geography will recur even more strongly in the South Polar narratives.

SOUTH: FEMALE GEOGRAPHY LITERALIZED

The Antarctic, indeed, proves a startling contrast to its northern counterpart. Where there is broad consensus about the physical makeup of the Arctic amongst authors of the period as a realm whose center will certainly reflect its periphery—cold and lifeless⁶—the icy outliers of the South Pole proved little obstacle to a northern imagining of a fertile south. Seaborn finds warm waters filled with seals and other profitable animals, as well as the passageway to his satirical utopia; Pym, archipelagos of new fauna, flora and a native population,

⁶ Notwithstanding, as mentioned, Porden’s flowering pole. Walton also evinces an odd belief, or perhaps mere hope, that “under the ‘masculine’ Enlightenment sun” which shines six months long at the pole (Lew 259), he should find a “region of beauty and delight [...] where snow and frost are banished” instead of the “seat of frost and desolation” he rationally knows it to be (Shelley 15).

however rugged; and More, a sub-tropical lost world cradling many civilizations and prehistoric megafauna. All these environments are productive in their own way, and all deny the cold dominion.

In large part, this discrepancy can be attributed to simple lack of knowledge: because there is a continent at the south pole rather than mere ocean, its ices extend into much higher latitudes than its northern counterpart, leaving a greater expanse of the map blank to the south than to the north. Too, the isolation of Antarctica—geographically relative to European seafaring powers—meant that western culture was far more familiar with the north than the south. This isn't to say that contemporaries weren't capable of drawing logical conclusions, analogous to the conditions at the north. Seaborn's crew must be convinced that they are not sailing into a frozen wasteland, requiring Seaborn to put forward a pseudo-scientific schema of heat and optics to account for his warm pole; *Pym* uses a similar scheme. *Strange Manuscript's* lost sailors reason that the weather should be getting colder if they continue to drift southwards; and though the text contains no explicit explanation for the subtropical realm at the pole—certainly nothing approaching *Symzonia's* diagram-like construct—it is strongly implied that the action of volcanism is meant to account for the unexpected environment found at the pole. It is not that the absence of knowledge about the southern polar region meant that its most logical character could not be inferred, merely that it allowed for the possibility of productive difference that writers of fiction could then interpret however they saw fit, with the required scientific hand-wave to explain why their south pole was not as would commonly be assumed.

There are, however, also metaphorical dimensions to how the south is constructed. According to *The Antarctic Dictionary*, the term 'Antarctica' itself is derived from the Greek “ανταρκτικός,” which is the feminine of “ανταρκτικός,” which means ‘opposite to north’ (Hince 6-7). In part, this feminization occurs because there is land at the South Pole, and continents are habitually gendered feminine in European culture; whereas the north, with an absence of earth to link it to feminine principles of fertility, retains its masculine form. There is a tendency for binary oppositions to map themselves inherently onto other,

similarly constructed dyads: and so north and south become analogous to male and female, linguistically. The political and economic relationships between northern, European powers and their typically more southerly colonies (if not always in the southern hemisphere *per se*) tended to feminize those colonial possessions—as more natural and less cultured, the site of instinct and the absence of industry, crystallized in a paternal (and so patriarchal) relationship where colonial administrators supposedly looked after overseas possessions as the head of a household would keep unmarried female members. This attitude was not confined to Europe: on the other side of the Atlantic, despite being only decades-young as a country, the United States enacted the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, claiming Central and South America as its sphere of influence and warning potential imperial suitors from Europe away—a paternalistic stance many would say endures to this day. Adam Seaborn, in his determination to claim the ‘virgin’ south polar islands for the United States before the British could, aptly demonstrates the attitude that led up to the Doctrine. There is also a set of bodily imagery at work, here: if the top of the world can be considered the ‘head,’ and the home countries—the site of domestic male/female ‘unity’—can be considered the ‘heart’ in the way that Geneva is Victor’s heart, or London the heart for the stranded sailors of *The Frozen Deep*, then the south pole too receives a bodily assignation; not the feet (though that might fit a personification of the globe better) but rather the lower body. And if the head is ‘manly,’ then the lower body is gendered feminine according to masculine fixation with female genitals and the uterus, itself often believed to dictate female/feminine behaviour like hysteria.

This sexual assignation is further demonstrated in the fictional geography of the south pole. Taken together, all the Antarctic narratives share a number of commonalities inherent to the travelogue and the area’s geography: they must all reach their newfound lands by ocean-faring vessels, and they all encounter—and must find a way around—what Seaborn, quoting John Cleves Symmes, Jr. (keeping in mind that Symmes might have been Seaborn himself), refers to as the “icy hoop” (c.f. Seaborn 42). This concentric ring of ice is also encountered by Adam More, who from sheer luck drifts through the frozen labyrinth, while Pym

aboard the *Jane Guy* has “to force a passage through” the field ice to reach the warm, open seas beyond (Poe 523). In all cases they discover past this barrier the unclaimed, fertile islands and continents of their respective narratives. Visualize this: a fertile center ringed by a protective barrier, like an ovum, assailed by a plethora of tiny vessels flowing through liquid like sperm—and the first one of these to reach and penetrate through the barrier, by maritime/evolutionary rules, gets to lay their personal and nationalistic claim on the new land. Although it may be anachronistic—Karl Ernst von Baer was just ‘discovering’ the mammalian ovum at the time *Symzonia* was published—it is difficult to imagine a more apt representation than this for the sexual dimension of exploration, discovery and colonization.

At a more literal level, however, particular aspects of the physical depiction of the pole and its surroundings also resonate with female investiture. *Symzonia* lays out a scheme in which there would be a giant opening at the bottom of the world, a conception often thought to have inspired the “chasm [that] threw itself open to receive” Pym and Peters in Poe’s *Pym* (Poe 560). These tales essentially want to carve a vagina into the lower body of the world; the sucking chasm of *Pym* particularly recalls the vortex, and its feminine, genital implications. Where *Pym*’s chasm might lead is unknown, as Pym dies at this point in recollecting his narrative; in reversing the direction of birth by going back into this global vagina, so too does Pym reverse his entry in life, as unbirthing is equalled with death. Things go somewhat better for Seaborn; his opening is navigable, and allows him access to the inner world—a type of womb, as the hollow space within (female) Earth. In Seaborn’s scheme, there are openings at *both* poles—but it is the more distant, southern indent on which Seaborn sets his sights, from which later narratives like *Pym* take their cue. Instead, in *Symzonia*, the northern pole is where humanity emerges from—a type of birthing, but one which privileges the north as an origin point.⁷

⁷ There is here a curious foreshadowing of the theosophists who, later in the century, would point to the north as the origin of humanity, at this time neuter beings of a higher spiritual nature—once again connecting the north as the realm of the ‘head,’ pure thought, while the sexless Hyperboreans echo the single-sexed character of Arctic expeditions.

Strange Manuscript employs similar analogies without resorting to a hollow earth scheme: De Mille devotes a chapter to detailing how his protagonist is drawn into a “vast chasm”—a gash in the mountains—which gradually becomes “some tremendous cavern,” “a subterranean channel” dark and watery, lit only at one point by “red volcanic glow” whose “roundness and resemblance to the moon” links a traditional symbol of femininity with the colour of blood and interior flesh (De Mille 40-41, 43). More passes through what is essentially a geological birth canal in reverse, and he emerges into a lost world entirely closed off by “mountains towering up to immeasurable heights” as though describing “some infinite circle” (De Mille 49); though the sky can still be seen, this is another rocky womb, and the prehistoric nature of the fauna there encountered further point towards More’s journey as a kind of age regression to a previous stage of life. More also experiences ‘unbirth,’ and though it is not fatal to him personally, it is fatal to his existence in the broader, social, civilized world as he finds this lost world is “a land from which escape is as impossible as from the grave,” collapsing pre-birth and death as dual forms of inexistence (De Mille 8). It bears mentioning that More does recollect the “old theory”—as well as “wild works of fiction”—regarding the possibility of openings at the pole as he drifts through the darkness (De Mille 42, 44), and in this revised scheme the oceanic waters would be drawn in at the south pole—the vortex—and spewed out at the north, echoing *Symzonia*’s earlier view of the south as the region of penetration and the north as the one of emergence, whether of waters or humanity, as though springing forth from Jupiter’s (and the world’s) head.

If the Antarctic landscape is gendered feminine, however, it does not follow that the protagonists of these stories are capable of exercising a typically masculine dominance over them, the way it was expected that European explorer colonists could, and often would, exert over their other southerly overseas possessions. Indeed, rather than being empowered by their discoveries, the heroes of polar narratives tend to be disarmed by the environment. Both Pym and Adam More find themselves disempowered—and somewhat repelled—by the female landscape they encounter in the south. Both are drifting towards and into the

bodily geography, robbed of agency. Pym is propelled towards the chasm at “hideous velocity” and the “rents” in the ocean produce “a chaos” and “soulless winds” (Poe 560). More, in his typically melodramatic fashion, loads his journey through the channel with negative descriptors—“a plunge deep down some unparalleled abyss,” “realms of eternal darkness” in which “I should die a lingering death of horror and despair” (De Mille 42, 44). But in south polar narratives it is largely vis-à-vis native populations that protagonists find themselves disempowered. Pym and his fellow sailors allowed themselves to be taken in by the Tsalal islanders, leading to the death of all but Pym and Peters: notably, this is not accomplished through battle, but when the islanders cause a cliff-face to collapse onto the Europeans—the islanders wield nature as a weapon, against which masculine European technology proves useless. Seaborn speaks only briefly of the women of Symzonia, and only compares them to European women rather than himself; but by inference, the physical capabilities of Symzonian men being thrice that of European men (discussed at greater length in the next chapter), proportionally then Symzonian women must be as strong if not stronger than European men, too. The Symzonians, generally, are seen as more in touch with nature, with the female-tended garden the center and source of most of the food for a household. At the end of his narrative, Seaborn finds that, having been swindled out of his profits from the trip, he not merely is incapable of paying his debts, but he must sell back the items purchased for his wife, and eventually cannot even provide for his wife and children—a failure as the head of the household.

In *Strange Manuscript*, More, on his arrival among the Kosekin, is immediately relegated to a luxurious cavern, a “golden or gilded” cage, complete with “soft cushions” and “soft mats,” previously reserved for the exclusive use of the maiden Almah, More’s first love interest. For most of the novel, More adopts a passive role, particularly before Laleyah, the final member of the love triangle, who alone among the Kosekin evinces Western-style ambition and desire to accumulate wealth. Whereas it is Laleyah who first enables More’s escape attempt, then intervenes to save his life after its failure, More finds himself in

physical thrall to her, just as he is, emotionally and spiritually, made dependant on Almah by his desperate love for her. Kosekin society itself tends to have more women than men in positions of authority in civilian and military hierarchies, and domestically within households, owing to the sex's allegedly lesser tendency for self-abnegation, in one of many inversions of Victorian ideals of the self-effacing woman. The Kosekin also practice ritual hunts, which may at first seem like a manly exercise, except that the hunt is actually a form of sacrifice as the Kosekin throw themselves heedless of danger at the great beasts who are their supposed targets, with many killed and maimed in the process. Like the more formal ritual sacrifices enacted by the Kosekin on the vernal and autumnal equinoxes, it is a form of death construed as deference to the natural world.

Though the North Pole is gendered masculine, there, too, a different kind of emasculation takes place. As has been mentioned, there were attempts to rewrite the bodily and mental consequences of polar travel into a narrative of manly trial and conquest over the elements, but the very need for that re-inscription—and its not-infrequent failures—point towards the unmanning effect of the harsh conditions of polar environments, on groups and individuals. In the former's case, this is usually manifest in the breaking of homosocial bonds. This is most explicit in *The Purple Cloud* and the list of betrayals required to get the protagonist to the pole. First, as mentioned, is the murder of his fiancée's nephew to grant him a place on the team; in refusing to inquire into the nephew's death, Jeffson sides with Clodagh's murderous femininity instead of a fellow man and prospective family member. Jeffson then, inadvertently and otherwise, kills fellow members of the expedition to assure himself a place on the smaller team going to the pole itself; and these men, too, he betrays, by taking advantage of their weakness to leave early and reach the pole first. Jeffson also considers himself, by his actions, responsible for the annihilation of humanity, by far the greatest collective betrayal one can imagine.

Less apocalyptically, Walton's determination to push ahead to the North Pole is met with mounting hostility on the part of the crew, as is the case in *Symzonia*—but Walton, unlike Seaborn, does not have any deft pseudo-science to

justify his belief in a warm pole, and cannot defuse the impending mutiny: “the men, unsupported by ideas of glory and honour” refuse to go on (Shelley 218). On his friend’s behalf, Frankenstein appeals to, and then critiques as lacking, masculine qualities in the sailors:

“Did you not call this a glorious expedition? And wherefore was it glorious? Not because the way was smooth and placid as a southern sea, but because it was full of dangers and terror; because, at every new incident, your fortitude was to be called forth, and your courage exhibited; because danger and death surrounded it, and these you were to brave and overcome. For this was it a glorious, for this was it an honourable undertaking. You were hereafter to be hailed as the benefactors of your species; your names adored, as belonging to brave men who encountered death for honour, and the benefit of mankind. And now, behold, with the first imagination of danger, or, if you will, the first mighty and terrific trial of your courage, you shrink away, and are content to be handed down as men who had not strength enough to endure cold and peril; (...) ye need not have come thus far, and dragged your captain to the shame of a defeat, merely to prove yourselves cowards. Oh! be men, or be more than men. Be steady to your purposes, and firm as a rock. This ice is not made of such stuff as your hearts may be; it is mutable, and cannot withstand you, if you say that it shall not. Do not return to your families with the stigma of disgrace marked on your brows. Return, as heroes who have fought and conquered, and who know not what it is to turn their backs on the foe.” (Shelley 217-218)

Frankenstein’s speech exemplifies both the way that the perils of the Arctic were meant to construct the masculine character, and the ultimate impossibility of competing for those gendered qualities against an environment of extremes. The sailors must be “more than men” in order to measure up with the hyper-masculine Arctic; Frankenstein wants them to harden their hearts to rock, but is mistaken in his hierarchy of rock over ice: in these temperatures, it is ice that is the sturdier, just as the glaciers work their effect upon rock, carving it and grinding it down (something Frankenstein should know from his own amateur glaciological interests). Walton says he would “rather die than return shamefully,” but must ultimately concede his unmaning: “I have lost my hopes of utility and glory,” now “blasted by cowardice and indecision,” including his own (Shelley 218). Rather than *reinforcing* masculine-producing homosociality, as Hill observes to

be the thrust behind the dramatizations of Nelson's and Franklin's arctic biographies, the polar environment actually has the opposing effect of *dismantling* the explorers' fraternities, either from physical suffering or mental stress.⁸

In addition to disassembling polities, Arctic conditions would also ravage the individual. Dickens' explorers still suffer collectively and individually, whatever their stoicism. Many sicken and die while the explorers are trapped (impotent) in their Arctic quarters, denied the powerful mobility that defines the active male explorer. That they must be 'rescued' by their female relatives, sailing up the Newfoundland coast, indicates the extent to which their Arctic ordeal has emasculated them. But the imperilled men come out the worse: Aldersley cannot stand, and must be carried in by Wardour, or supported by his fiancée. Wardour, though possessed of the last few frantic scraps of physical strength, appears "*clothed in rags; his hair is tangled and grey; his looks and gestures are those of a man whose reason is shaken, and whose bodily powers are sinking from fatigue*" (Collins & Dickens 155; original italics). His appearance is of a kind with Victor Frankenstein after his long pursuit through the Arctic, whose "limbs were nearly frozen, and his body dreadfully emaciated by fatigue and suffering. I never saw a man in so wretched a condition" (Shelley 26). Victor cannot stand, either on deck or rising from his bed, without fainting. Their distress is mental as well as physical: a sailor says of Wardour, and not without cause, "[t]he poor wretch is out of his mind," while Victor's "eyes have generally an expression of wildness, even madness" (Collins & Dickens 156; Shelley 27). Both Wardour and Victor expire once their stories have been told. Jeffson, can be imagined to have suffered similarly, though he does survive his Arctic ordeal. Certainly the narrative is constructed in such a way to illustrate his tenuous grasp on reality, with fragmentary paragraphs and a continuous paranoid-delusion fixation on spiritual oppressors; when he cries out to a ship of corpses, "*Madmen! I have been to the Pole!*" we understand that this accusation of insanity is not directed at the dead,

⁸ Because it was Dickens' explicit aim to refute the fraternity-destroying hypothesis that Franklin's men had resorted to cannibalism, the sailors of *The Frozen Deep* do not succumb to social fraying. The conflict is instead displaced onto Wardour and Aldersley, as the former contemplates the murder of his fellow explorer and romantic rival, but ultimately the threat to the polity is overcome.

but at himself, and in the he end will flirt with acknowledging his “long years of madness” (Shiel 68, 225; original emphasis). In this extremity, Jeffson feminizes himself by adopting the habits of an oriental despot, whose supposed indolence and sensuality had long been linked with femininity in Western thought; the transformation takes place in a “boudoir”—a lady’s room—and involves perfume, jewellery, robes, etc—a form of transvestism both cultural and gendered (Shiel 133).

This apparent tension between a *de jure* primacy of gendered and geographic masculinity and a *de facto* vulnerability to feminine principles can be explicated when one considers the sheer number of ‘Adam’ figures to be found in these texts. These are not hidden references by any means: the protagonist of *Symzonia* is named Adam Seaborn; of *Strange Manuscript*, Adam More; and of *The Purple Cloud*, Adam Jeffson. Frankenstein’s Monster likens himself to Adam (cf. Shelley 103, 132, 134). The biblical allusions are clear: here is the first man, whose dominance over all things (including his female companion) is divinely sanctioned, but whose vulnerability to ‘feminine inveigling’ brings about his downfall. The appellation is particularly resonant with the latter two texts listed here, but even in the first two texts the name is not gratuitous. Seaborn heartily embraces the explorer’s function as namer, a task handed down by God to his biblical counterpart; and so previously unknown lands coalesce into existence (from the perspective of a European corpus of knowledge) under Seaborn’s authority as ‘Seaborn’s Land,’ ‘Cape Worldsend,’ ‘Token Island,’ ‘Albicare’s Islands.’ Even ‘Symzonia’ itself is not a local name but one bestowed by Seaborn after the ‘natural philosopher’ who may, indeed, be the author himself—one of the rare times Seaborn and European culture appear to have the upper hand on the master race who reside there. More, like the biblical Adam, is a foundational hero in his persona of ‘Atam-Or,’ as his name is mispronounced by Almah and among the Kosekin. At the novel’s climax, he innovates a new form of Kosekin society, acquiring divine imprimatur through the Kosekin’s misunderstanding of his firearms; echoing epithets they had previously directed at him, he declares: “I am Atam-or, the Man of Light! I come from the land of light! I am the Father of

Thunder, of Cloud and Darkness; the Judge of Death!” (De Mille 263) His title reads both as a pagan deity and as a biblical patriarch⁹. His rise to semi-divine status is concomitant with his union with Almah, an Eve counterpart insofar as she is expected to share her husband’s duties and partial divinity. And the subtropical South Pole of *Strange Manuscript* is an apt primordial Garden, whose prehistoric fauna and the cohabitation of dinosaur and man recalls a pre-Lapserian, or at least pre-Flood, world.

The Monster and Jeffson embody the role of Adam in their respective narratives. The Monster, of course, is the first of a new species (as he, and sometimes Victor, perceives it), and his greatest desire is to solicit an Eve from his creator, with whom he sees himself vanishing into an uninhabited region (and as such another primordial locale) of South America where he will be the patriarch of this race. The scheme is a conscious imitation of the myth he read in *Paradise Lost*. Jeffson too recognizes the eerie similarities between his circumstances and the biblical stories, and though he attempts to resist, he finds himself eventually compelled to fulfill the procreative functions his archetype demands from him. The text makes an explicit analogy between Genesis and the expedition to the North Pole in a preacher’s sermon: “like ‘the Tree of Knowledge’ in ‘Eden,’ he said, was that Pole: ... persistently veiled and ‘forbidden’” (Shiel 6); the metaphor extends insofar as Jeffson commits the ‘original sin’ of viewing the forbidden sight (whose sexual nature will be discussed later) at the North Pole at the exhortation of a woman, his murdering fiancée. The habitual narrative is somewhat reversed in that the story begins with this original sin, and only then moves into a depopulated world in which Jeffson is the sole reasoning being—until, as the myth demands, he finds the last (and first) woman: “it was for this that I was preserved: I to be a species of First-man, and this creature to be my Eve” (Shiel 224). The correlation is so perfect that Jeffson, when this newfound woman proposes to call herself Eve, refuses

⁹ It is perhaps fitting that his new name bears as much resemblance of the creator-god ‘Atum’ of the Egyptian pantheon as to Adam. Indeed, good Christian that he has been until now, More mixes solar worship into his faith when the sun finally appears after months of darkness: “‘O Light!’ I cried. “O gleaming, golden Sunlight! O Light of Heaven! ...’ And I could have fallen on my knees and worshipped that rising sun” (De Mille 268).

supposedly on the basis that good taste does not admit something so obvious: “we do not wish to be ridiculous in each other’s eyes,” though it is the procreative connotations he truly wishes to sidestep (Shiel 253).

Why so many Adams? In part, travel through space becomes equivalent to travel through time, and the following chapter will discuss the way in other texts function as a return to the biblical era of the patriarchs. But Adam, as the first man, holds a special position; he is inherently connected to the idea of Creation. And the poles, particularly the literary North Pole, as they are characterized by darkness, by cold, by lifelessness, and by a certain incoherency of form where everything in this environment—ice and water—are just versions of each other, take on the role of the primordial vacuum or undifferentiated chaos at the beginning of so many mythologies, including the Christian one. To create, Victor seeks isolation and the company of corpses (and the Monster, composed of a multiplicity of bodies, himself emerges from—and retains, to a certain extent—forms both similar and incoherent); when considering the creation of a female, he must surround himself with the barren landscape of the far Orkneys in order to produce life. To travel to the extremity of the world, in *The Purple Cloud*, is to travel back to the very moment of Creation itself, to witness the evidence of the divine amidst the nothingness from which matter first sprung. And so we return to the paradox of productive absence: God or any other such power capable of creation *ex nihilo* performs a role not unlike that of the author, who creates upon the blank page, and our authors specifically, who generate content from the blankness of the map at the poles.

UNMANNED AT THE EXTREME

It bears mentioning at this point that there is no consistent depiction, positive or negative, of women themselves (if not femininity) across the breadth of nineteenth-century polar fiction. *Symzonia*’s fleeting mentions of the sex are largely positive, at least towards Symzonian women. Pym, who otherwise incessantly excoriates the Tsalal islanders for their supposed savage nature, is surprisingly (if grudgingly) kind to their women: “[t]hey were straight, tall, and

well formed, with a grace and freedom of carriage not to be found in civilized society,” so “not altogether wanting in what might be termed personal beauty” (Poe 533). The female characters of *The Frozen Deep* are, with one exception, sources of strength for each other and their male counterparts—particularly Wardour. It may be significant that two of the three works with the most positive depictions of women, *Symzonia* and *Pym*, only briefly acknowledge that women even exist¹⁰: distance permits idealization, and the general absence of women is due to the protagonists’ distance from their respective domestic spheres, implying that women can be respected here because they keep to their proscribed place. The Symzonian and Tsalal women in the new lands certainly do: Tsalal women are encountered only when Pym visits the islanders’ cave-residences, and *Symzonia*, despite a claim of equality of the sexes in this new country, limits women to very conventional domestic tasks of gardening, cloth-making and child-rearing, taking as ‘natural’ a feminine lack of interest in affairs of state. In neither book do women ever get a line of dialogue; they are, literarily, seen but not heard. Women are very much present in *The Frozen Deep*, but here as well the positive depiction is linked to a certain conventionality. The first act takes place entirely in the home the female relatives of the explorers are sharing until their fathers, brothers and husbands return, an image of domesticity. The women do resolve, after years pass without news, to follow a rescue expedition as far as Newfoundland—actions that seem quite bold in the context of both the play and gender roles of the time. But we are never shown the women in this active mode; by the time the audience meets them again, they have reunited with their men among the Arctic explorers, and once again take up a dependant role¹¹. They even go so far as to improvise a new domestic sphere out in the wilderness, substituting a cavern for the home, where the ‘frail’ women can retreat from the weather and emotional shocks, and is used for food preparation and meal-taking, etc. Women

¹⁰ This absence likely explains the dearth of gender-related criticism on both these texts, although this writer obviously believes *Pym* is well-suited to analyses of masculinity.

¹¹ It bears mention that in Wilkie Collins’ subsequent novelization/rewriting of the play, the female lead Clara is granted a far more active role throughout. This time, she has the visions that belong to her maid in the play, and uses them to pursue her goals in defiance of several male characters. See Nayder 97-98.

in polar narratives (as with most of the literature at this time) are ‘good’ largely to the extent that they meet with contemporary, received notions of how women should behave—excepting, as discussed, Porden’s questing ladies.

Strange Manuscript offers a contrast of good and bad women¹². The tale boasts two principal female characters, second only to the protagonist in importance to the story. Their characters rely on conventional stereotypes, the beautiful damsel in distress and alluring femme fatale embodied by Almah and Layelah respectively, a dynamic further reinforced by the love triangle created by their mutual interest in More. Because Layeleh is only introduced much later, and then only as an ultimately unsuccessful foil to the consummation of More and Almah’s love, it is the positive (if typically passive) female character who is triumphant. More does, however, reserve his greatest expressions of horror—in a long catalogue of such reactions—for the woman he refers to as the “nightmare hag” (cf. De Mille 34, 36, etc.). Although average Kosekin women are pleasant enough, amongst the respected pauper class he encounters at the outer edges of the lost continent, all “the women were hags, hideous beyond description” and their leader “was actually terrible in her awful and repulsive ugliness. A nightmare dream never furnished forth a more frightful object” (De Mille 33-34). When he meets her and her fellow pauper women—essentially handmaidens to the lowest, and thus greatest, of Kosekin women—again at the end of the story, he launches into a tirade of insults (somewhat inarticulate, in his distress at the sight of them): “[t]he women—the hags of horror—the shriek-like ones, as I may call them, or the fiend-like, the female fiends, the foul ones—they were all around us” (De Mille 251-252). Though More is imprisoned with the Chief Pauper, “a hideous wretch (...) a devil incarnate in rags and squalor” and similar men, More nonetheless thinks that Almah’s “associates”—the Nightmare Hag and the female paupers—“were worse than mine, and her fate had been more bitter” (De Mille 246, 252). No surprise that the Nightmare Hag is the first More kills in the novel’s

¹² Despite the resurgent popularity of this text among critics, there has been little written about its treatment of gender, perhaps owing to the conventionality of the main female characters. The role of women in broader Kosekin society, however, seems ripe for further analysis beyond what is examined here.

climax. More's double standard is simply that however wretched a person may be, it is always worse when that wretchedness is embodied in a woman—an attitude readers of *Frankenstein* will readily recognize.

Such abjuration of a feminine principle can also be found in the particular inversions that mark Kosekin society. Though More initially claims that “women and men are in every respect absolutely equal, holding precisely the same offices and doing the same work (...) it is observed that women are a little less fond of death than men, and a little less unwilling to receive gifts” (De Mille 142). These supposedly innate qualities conflict with the Kosekin love of death and poverty, such that women are held in lesser esteem, represented by the fact that “they are very numerous among the wealthy class, (...) offices of administration [and] serve in the army and navy (...) as officers and generals” (De Mille 142). The text's dual inversions conspire to keep women relegated to a lower status: the initial reversal of Western hierarchy would seem to grant women higher status, but the superimposition of a traditional, top-down hierarchy onto the reversed values of the Kosekin—the love of death, poverty and servitude—‘restore’ women to their position of moral inferiority to men. This is also the case in the domestic sphere: “husbands have an apparently subordinate, but, to the Kosekin, more honourable position” (De Mille 142).

The Kosekin's attitudes towards love and sex are telling. Love is great only inasmuch as it permits suffering, through separation from the object of affection; customs and ceremonies are designed to ensure that loving, male-female couples cannot develop, and their general loathing of life well reflects the Kosekin's attitude towards the fruits of such a union. Their culture still reproduces, of course, otherwise it would die out—and suicide, as a social convenience, is the only form of death the Kosekin look down upon, as a kind of ‘cheating’ the natural, religiously-invested progression from life to death. Though the Kosekin themselves inhabit a lush, fertile environment, fertility is not prized; indeed, despite the loveless procreation that does occur, the Kosekin's death-worship comes as a partial (at the very least!) refutation of life: their view of the afterlife—which they long for greatly—is one of perpetual darkness and non-

existence. It is a state of being that aligns itself with More's own allegorical unbirth/death on passing through the underground passageway, and with the way, as previously discussed, the North Pole takes on the role of dark, primordial void. And just as *Strange Manuscript* points towards the similarities between, and indeed collapses, the states of pre-life and post-life, so too does the Arctic environment, in its infertility, acquire a dual though similar status as pre-Creation and post-Apocalypse (the destruction inherent in the latter condition is implied, and then fulfilled, in *Frankenstein* and *The Purple Cloud* respectively). The pole becomes an "indifferently powerful source of creation and destruction" (Gilbert & Gubar, as quoted in Dobson & Luce-Kapler 269).

Victor Frankenstein's attitude towards women is notoriously troubling if not outright misogynistic¹³—his discomfort with the recursive, female-directed nature of his own domestic sphere extended to the sex as a whole in his attempt to supplant feminine fertility with his own masculine scheme. Victor's disgust with women (the women in his life specifically, but read to stand in for the sex more generally) is famously manifest in his nightmare where he kisses his fiancée only for her to transform into the corpse of his mother, and his standoffish attitude towards the women he supposedly cares about like Justine and Elizabeth. He wanders the halls on his "very dreadful" wedding night instead of joining his new bride (Shelley 199), essentially permitting the Monster to take his place in the wedding bed. The consummation of the marriage is replaced by an act of extreme violence which yet seems appropriate considering both sex and violence elicit in Victor similar repulsion, and so substitute for one another. This attitude reaches its apogee as he attempts to create an Eve for the Monster: "she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her mate, and delight (...) in murder and wretchedness" (Shelley 170). Victor speculates that the "deformity" of this "race of devils" may spawn "a greater abhorrence" when "in the female form" (Shelley

¹³ Owing to its authorship and themes, the issue of women and gender in *Frankenstein* has received a great deal of attention from critics, and it would be impossible to effectively summarize that scholarship in the space here available. Instead, interested reader are directed to Schoene-Harwood's chapter summarizing such criticism in *Mary Shelley: Frankenstein* (88-130), and to the selected bibliography of *Frankenstein* criticism related to feminist and gender perspectives in Johanna Smith's edition of the novel (312-313 and 348-349).

170)—an attitude he projects onto the Monster but could just as easily be his, or any other contemporary for whom beauty is a defining female attribute, and which caused Adam More to hold the female paupers in greater horror than their male counterparts. The fact that female Monster “in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal” troubles him (Shelley 170), because she may not blindly accept the Monster as her mate, or honour the agreements he has made (cf. Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 13-14)—behaviour that can be termed ‘unwifely’ by contemporary standards, and aligns ‘bad’ femininity with what have been designated the masculine attributes of the intellect.

But nothing about this prospective woman instils as much fear in Victor as her potential fertility. Setting aside niggling questions of whether people made from corpses could even be fertile, or why Victor does not simply ‘omit’ a womb from his construction of the female, Victor finally convinces himself to destroy the Monster’s anticipated bride (foreshadowing Elizabeth’s own violent wedding night) when he speculates that the couple will have “children” (the “race of devils”) “who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror” (Shelley 170-171). There is an ironic reversal of Walton’s belief that his project will be of “inestimable benefit (...) on all *mankind* to the last generation” in Victor’s belief that his project will result in a “curse upon everlasting generations”—or, at least, until they are finally wiped out, as Victor sees in his Monster(s) the potential extinction of the human race (Shelley 16, 171). Fertility is a threat, but it also arrives in the context of Victor’s attempt to displace, and possibly replace, the usual notion of feminine fertility (with all its ‘natural,’ lower-body implications), with a type of asexual reproduction that emerges from the fertility of the masculine imagination and scientific knowledge, offspring of mind and thought instead of the bodily functions that seem to discomfit Victor so. Ultimately, the result of the masculinist project is a threat to *human* fertility, by which the species itself could decline and die off, because of an inability to compete with the physical extremity that the Monster represents. And for Victor personally, the quest to make “himself a god-like, hypermasculine transgressor” of the traditional paired gender scheme has the ironic consequence

of turning him into the “most irresistibly iconic image of feminine domesticity:” motherhood, or at least, a kind of “male mother” (Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 12; Smith 355). Where Frankenstein’s creative act is “the ultimate feat of masculine self-assertion” because it enables a world where women become obsolete, “it also erases traditional gender distinctions,” collapsing the categories of male and female, “and thus compromises [his] manliness” (Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 12).

If *Frankenstein* hints at human extinction, *The Purple Cloud* accomplishes it, pulling back from the brink only at the end, and only if one accepts that divine intervention is at work that will allow the species to be repopulated from only two individuals, instead of soon collapsing from the genetic burden of inbreeding. *The Purple Cloud*, like *Frankenstein*, is a text where perceptions of women, mediated through the protagonist, are very negative—although, like *Frankenstein*, it is possible to see through the narrator’s biases and to potential, implicit criticism of misogyny shown in the consequences attendant on the protagonists’ ill-treatment of the women in their lives. The aforementioned Countess Clodagh is certainly a negative character regardless of perspective, but Jeffson is readily seen as abominable when he names, and strives to treat, the newly-discovered and thoroughly innocent Leda as Clodagh, clumping the entire female sex under the umbrella of the example of the bad femininity that spurred him into (and thus, in his view, shares the blame for) his disastrous visit to the pole. What he finds there neatly matches the idea of the sexualized polar landscape. There is a literal pole—“a pillar of ice, low and thick”—which carries with it all the phallic implications of such a monument, the universal male symbol at the center of the most masculine environment; onto the icy obelisk is inscribed “a name (...) that could never be read; and under the name a lengthy date” (Shiel 41), which, by the novel’s context, lays further claim that this monument had a divine craftsman. This pillar thrusts from a giant, circular (and thus, in depth, half-spherical) lake filled with “fluid [that] was the substance of a living being” (Shiel 41); when read against the icy phallus, this lake can be seen as the sexual opposite: the spherical lake and its living liquid takes on the shape of a womb and its amniotic fluid.

Jeffson's impression that the fluid evinces "shivering ecstasy" and "fluttering lust" towards the pillar calls upon a sexual vocabulary that further reinforces the idea that what he is witnessing is the intercourse of geological sex organs, a kind of ancient, perpetual coitus taking place at a level far beyond the human (Shiel 41).

Jeffson believes he has stumbled across "the eternal secret of this earth from her birth" (Shiel 41)—we note the gendering of the earth as female, and the use of 'birth' that calls to the very creation of the planet, the moment of Genesis, reinforced by the comparison earlier in the book between the secret of the North Pole to the Forbidden Fruit of the Eden myth. Indeed, Jeffson feels strongly that he has transgressed by viewing this primordial sex act; the sight gives him a "horrid thrill" and "it was a burning shame for a worm to see," let alone a man (Shiel 41)—licitious, sexual censure that recalls the knowledge of sexuality apparently transmitted to Adam and Eve in their consumption of the fruit, and their subsequent awareness and shame at their nudity. Jeffson faints at the sight, and why not: he is like a child who has stumbled upon his parents in mid-intercourse, and who turns away from the stark, bodily reality of his own creation¹⁴. And like a petulant child, Jeffson persists in snubbing the 'father,' or the voice associated with the White and God, refusing to follow his dictates even as he craves forgiveness. His horror of sex is manifest in his encounter with Leda: after a few days of confusion about her reality—to be expected from a man who has been alone for years, and mentally unstable—he becomes terribly hostile to her when he apperceives that the convenient alignment of their sexes could allow them to replenish the human species; indeed, he believes she has been 'provided' for him, by the White, for that explicit purpose. But Jeffson, at this point, firmly

¹⁴ One could say they are 'parents' in a celestial sense: the feminine, living earth seems like a permutation on the Earth Goddess trope, while the phallic, skywards pillar represents the patriarchal Sky Father trope who would eventually come to supplant his female counterpart in most western pantheons and cosmologies. The fixation the liquid apparently bears for the pillar ("it kept its many gazes riveted on ... the pillar") and its vacillating feelings, sometimes ecstatic and sometimes "dull, repining" not only reinforces the distinction between the mutable feminine lake and the stable, impassive masculine pillar, it also establishes the dominance of the pillar not only in being higher than, and permitted to enter into, the lake, but suggests that the lake has a dependence on the pillar that is not reciprocated (Shiel 41).

aligns himself with the Black, refuses the obvious sexual pairing, and seeks to ensure the final, entropic collapse of what he views as a corrupt species.

Where biblical Original Sin was punished by sending humanity out to populate the world, the transgression of viewing the pole—in Jeffson's mind, and perhaps the logic of the text—results in the depopulation of the world as a massive volcanic eruption in the South Seas creates a deadly cloud of cyanogen gas that envelops the globe except for the highest Arctic latitudes where Jeffson alone survives. This culpability hews together the masculine exploration project and the dominion of infertility as much as Victor's quest for sexless, masculine reproduction creates the threat of extinction. In 'conquering' even the hyper-masculine polar environment, Jeffson overcomes the last barrier to male domination over the world, literalized when, in consequence, a male *becomes* the world by the absence of all others. As with *Frankenstein*, the entropic disaster of male dominion arises partly as a result of dedifferentiation: when masculinity encompasses everything (a state here represented geographically, as contrasted to *Frankenstein's* abrogation of sexual functions), it ceases to be a useful, bounded category of being; as mentioned, Jeffson's masculinity eventually dissolves into a kind of transvestism neither masculine nor truly feminine, and he remains in that state so long as he embodies the whole of humanity—male and female, western and oriental. He has become the Arctic, in its primordial reading—the formless confusion of similar elements; “the arctic poles bring about a union of the same,” the meeting place of doubles Walton, Frankenstein and the Monster (Kilgour 24), and that very similarity becomes mutually destructive. Apocalypse is the inherent complement of the pole's association with Creation.

It is only when Adam Jeffson encounters a woman, a not-male, that he can begin the process of redefining himself in masculine terms. The definition of selfhood by the presence of the Other carries its own set of problems, as various critics have observed, but in this case difference is read as being productive, in the same way that the separation of elements allows Creation to take place in various cosmogonies. Jeffson's eventual acceptance of Leda as companion and mate presents an intermediary stance—limited contact—between the extremes

presented in these polar narratives: the unproductive, outright refusal of sexuality of Victor and Jeffson for much of his narrative on the one hand (no contact), and the entropic unity of humanity engulfed by the knowledge project that seeks to encompass everything under a masculine principle (total contact). Blank spaces, it has been argued, enable creativity. They cannot do this by themselves: it is obvious, but worth stating for the sake of contrast, that the authors of polar narratives bring their own knowledge set into these spaces, with the ‘emptiness’ of the locale allowing for the imaginative freedom to reconstitute those elements to create adventure, drama, satire, etc. Alone, they cannot generate anything; however, the absence of blank space—the presence of a totality of knowledge—is precisely that which drove authors of speculative fiction in the nineteenth century to seek out the Ant/Arctic for their stories; and, after those environments become known and familiar, later generations of speculative writers must seek out new planets and side dimensions in search of productive absence and creative license. So it is with people: alone all efforts, however passionate, are doomed to dissolution, just as total unity proves entropic. It is in the blank spaces between bounded individuals that relationships—ultimately, imagined things—can be created, and across the divide that fertility is made possible.

Most polar narratives end by reaffirming the necessary connection between masculinity and femininity, and/or male and female, to balance and make productive masculine principles. This is *not* the case in *Symzonia* and *Pym*, and is partly why these stories end on ‘down’ notes—one destitute, the other dead. Seaborn is already married, but the potential of the relationship has vanished; whereas Pym simply has no female interest, and, in leaving behind an incomplete manuscript, finally fails in his own attempts at creation *sui generis*. This is comparable to *Frankenstein*: Victor’s (nigh purposeful) disconnect from feminine principles, capped in the murder of his bride before the marriage is even consummated, results in his dissolution and death by the end of the book; a fate which the Monster, also denied his female counterpart, will duplicate by committing suicide (or so he claims). Robert Walton, however, survives, and is capable—albeit reluctantly—of turning away from his doomed project, back

towards domesticity. Why? Because one of Walton's overriding characteristics is his connection to his sister, who raised him like a mother, and represents the feminine domesticity he simultaneously seeks to flee and is attracted by: his portion of the narrative, and therefore the novel as a whole, takes the form of letters to his sister; even when there is no possibility of such letters reaching her, Walton maintains the imaginary relationship to the chief woman in his life, and it is along that strand that he can be reeled back in from the entropy of the Arctic environment. *Strange Manuscript* also has a problematic ending, in that the introduction to the tale speaks of the protagonist's death-like inability to escape, yet the portion of the manuscript which is made available in the novel actually does end on a positive note, as Adam More successfully manipulates Kosekin values to not only save his life but become—by his Western values—their ruler, with wealth, servants and everything else he may desire. It is no coincidence that this moment occurs simultaneously with his reunion with his love interest Almah, and makes her his 'queen' in his new social order. *The Purple Cloud* ends with the protagonist finding happiness by reconciling himself to the idea of divine authority and his own role as Leda's lover and eventual parent of a new human race—their union is read as a victory. The sailors of the *The Frozen Deep* reunite with their female relatives, and we are told by Wardour that he managed to avoid falling to both his own murderous temptations and to the harsh conditions of the environment by constantly keeping his beloved Clara at the forefront of his thoughts—like Walton, he escapes the masculine Arctic thanks to his psychic connection to the feminine, at home. Wardour does die, but his self-sacrificing death removes the last obstacle to the future union of the fiancées Aldersley and Clara.

It may be said that, after the imaginative extremes of plot and setting found in Arctic narratives, these endings are fairly conventional: they conclude with the union of the male and female characters much the same as the way Romantic and Victorian sentimental novels tend to end with a marriage. In part, that is true—the novels' models of happiness are traditional and heteronormative, rebuffing what alternative lifestyles may be encountered to sing the praises of

love and home (although the fact that the unions are never literal marriages—at best, they are figurative or prospective—may be a final allowance of the adventure genre for its scepticism of domesticity). However, we should consider the societal context in which these stories are told, the strong emphasis on a reified division between masculine and feminine space. The sentimental novel could end with a marriage without upsetting that balance; the new pairing still finds women in the domestic sphere and men abroad. Polar narratives, however, pursue these adventuresome males to the very limits of geography, into strongly masculine spheres of science and exploration, into environments themselves written as masculine—and find the overwhelmingly masculine nature of such spaces ultimately destructive and entropic. These stories gainsay the desirability of male-only environments by taking such an idea to the extreme, and illustrate the disastrous consequences thereof; and so speak to the necessity of a feminine counterbalance to masculine values in all spaces.

PART II: WHITE SKIN, BLANK SPACES:
THE EUROPEAN AS RACIAL OTHER

Amidst repeated descriptions of the Ant/Arctic regions as uninhabited and bare of life, or the excoriation of the native populations, real and imagined, who have made a life for themselves in these climes, there is one group of people who often go unremarked, and that is the explorers themselves. Because they are our protagonists, because we are often encouraged to sympathize and conflate our view of the narrative with their own, their presence can efface itself as easily as they efface the native Others; being almost universally white, masculine and western, their perspective tends to be the normative one and thus camouflaged as average, typical. Many critics over the last few decades have noted the *physical* impact of their presence: the economic motives behind exploration and colonialism, the stripping of local environments to commercial purposes. Dana Nelson, to name one, demonstrates how closely the narrative of exploration in *Pym* aligns itself with the rationales of industry; the *Jane Guy* leaves port fully equipped to cull—literally—the mineral and animal wealth of the islands it intends to visit (Nelson 94-95). *Symzonia*, too, spends much of the time before and after the central utopian section of the text detailing the sheer numbers of seals slaughtered during the voyage; yet however those dry, economic details of the butchery may disturb a modern reader, they would have been perfectly reasonable to most contemporary readers, who would only expect that such an undertaking, to be bankrolled, should have good prospects of profitability. To see past our assumptions always requires a certain distance—and one of the central assumptions of this period was the innate goodness and superiority of the white race.

Again, the physical effects of colonization and the racist hierarchies imported to overseas territories—the exploitation, the impoverishment, the genocides cultural and literal—have hardly escaped the attention of critics. The mental effects are always more elusive, but have nonetheless produced a great range of theory from observers of race and colonialism like Frantz Fanon or Homi

Bhabha. As well as documenting the psychological effects on the colonized people, critics have observed the way these patterns of behaviour have solidified the self-conceptions of the colonizers—it is, by now, conventional to say that the exploring/colonizing Europeans define themselves in contrast to the racial Other, that the process of denigration and rejection of native peoples is a simultaneous process of definition (and elevation) of the self. However, if generally seen as benefitting the (white) imperial power, it is not entirely unproblematic—Bhabha, to give one example, has detailed the way in which mimicry on the part of the colonized has an uncanny, destabilizing effect on the colonizer: having the racial Other behave akin to the white master while still being visibly different can upset carefully constructed hierarchies and demarcations of race and behaviour.

The Ant/Arctic expressed in these literary texts poses its own, unique challenge to the racial self-conceptions of the explorer. Where the traditional narrative of European exploration was that of a white man bringing civilization to the dark corners of the Earth—so called for the skin tone of natives and their perceived lack of civilization—the poles do not lend themselves as readily to the usual story: “[f]rozen lands of whiteness required a different form of representation [than] tropical hearts of darkness” (Kilgour 24). There may be plenty of darkness to be found in the half-year nights that extend themselves seasonally across these regions; this perpetual night can be used to atmospheric effect, to reinforce claustrophobia and despair, as Shelley and Shiel make use of it during Walton’s, Frankenstein’s and Jeffson’s hellish journeys to/from the pole. But they find their counterpoint in the other half of the year bathed in perpetual light, more reminiscent of heavenly/utopian realms (like the Blazing World or Symzonia); places that the explorer goes to be enlightened her/himself, rather than bringing light to the dark, remote areas of the Earth. Some narratives will use both aspects as a means of establishing contrast: Poe juxtaposes the seemingly eternal sunshine of the South Polar day and the omnipresent ‘whiteness’ at the pole with the ‘black’-dominated Isle of Tsalal, whereas De Mille uses the months-long cycle of light and darkness to match the tone of the narrative, initial wonderment (daylight) turning into revulsion at Kosekin society, and despair literalized by his

own imprisonment during the long night, only to be freed (or as free as possible) on the spring solstice and the return of the light. De Mille, of course, manages to create a 'dark' people in a land of light by supposing they retreat to a network of caverns during the daylight months.

If the strong binary of night and day at the poles could be used to generate either darkness or light—or both—as the tone of the narrative requires, the environment itself poses greater difficulty. The polar areas are, as discussed, blank spaces; between the ice and the snow, the predominant colour associated with the Ant/Arctic is white. While it is happenstance that this is the colour Europeans chose to ascribe to themselves as part of broader cultural and racial schemas that ascribe significance to shades, the coincidence becomes imbued with meaning by those authors who project white explorers into the white spaces of the Arctic and Antarctic. Just as the Arctic's association with masculinity makes it emblematic of maleness, so too does "the whiteness of the landscape ... reflect the noble enterprise" of the civilizing mission (Kilgour 24). Just as the hyper-masculine character that becomes associated with the Arctic proves a threat to the explorer's own masculinity, such that they cannot compete or incur disastrous consequences when they do, so too does the 'hyper-white' characteristic of the polar environments invite conflation and comparison with the whiteness of the men who venture there, and render problematic their own racial identity, underpinned as it is by colour hierarchies. These threats to racial identity can take a number of forms, and prove fearful to the characters: being outclassed, racially or performatively, by 'natives' discovered there; being outclassed by the white environment itself; not being recognized as 'white,' or whiteness not being recognized as desirable, in abutting against the different worldviews of local cultures; and even polar variations on the habitual colonialist fear of 'going native.' They have the effect of disrupting racial hierarchies and revealing the constructed nature of the ideologies behind colour and race.

Sometimes a perceived white inferiority can simply be the result of the maladaptive material and cultural circumstances in this new environment: white male explorers struggle to survive in places where supposedly inferior Others have been living for millennia. Ballantyne's more realistic Arctic texts like *Ungava* recount the day-to-day problems of sub-Arctic living, which the Inuit 'characters' (most as blank as the landscape) pass through with relative ease. But it is *Giant of the North* that literalizes this cultural inferiority by making its Inuit character—Chingatok, the eponymous giant—physically greater; nor is he a barbarous giant, but one with a cultivated sense of humour, and is furthermore “like the British seamen themselves, an intrepid and brave adventurer (...) on his own voyage of discovery to the south” (Hill 158). Chingatok reverses the expected racial relationship: not only does he outperform European explorers at their own apparent expertise as explorers, but in looking towards the sub-Arctic regions to the south as the unknown lands to be discovered, he is placing Europe and America in the habitual role of the Other. Chingatok's oasis of culture near the North Pole brings to mind ancient legends of Hyperborean lands and people, the far-north utopia of Grecian myths which recur in *Blazing-World*. Chingatok's jovial temperament and physical might recall the blessed population believed to dwell beyond Boreas' breath, which in the nineteenth century was also the basis for theosophical treatises that saw the North Pole, and the Hyperboreans that once (and maybe still) lived there, as the more perfect version of humanity. That said, Ballantyne does motion to contain this apparent threat: Chingatok and his mother are seemingly the lone representatives of these Hyperborean-like Inuit, and in his eager acceptance that his home serve as a British embassy, Chingatok signals the cultural superiority of the English. However great he may be in terms of physique and temperament, he wishes to be like white men; Chingatok does not venture south to bring his culture to the lands he discovers as Europeans do, but rather to find the culture he is apparently lacking and bring that example of European civilization back home with him, for their improvement.

If the geographic proximity of the Arctic made it harder to believe (outside the hidden spiritual worlds of theosophy) in a Hyperborean land at the North Pole, might there be an equivalent population at the South Pole—Hyperaustralians? Perhaps the ‘Internals’ from *Symzonia* might qualify. This is the text that deals with the insufficient whiteness of its European protagonists most explicitly: if from afar the ‘Internals,’ the native population that the narrator encounters after passing within the Earth through the gap at the south pole, seem “fair skinned,” close examination reveals that the Symzonians exceed our narrator “in fairness of complexion and delicacy of form” to the same degree as he holds that Europeans exceed “the sootiest African (...) in darkness of skin and grossness of features” (Seaborne 108-109). Indeed, Seaborn thinks that he appears as “a goblin” to these people, and his “dark and hideous appearance” causes them to flee and seek shelter when first he disembarks onto their lands (Seaborne 107). Seaborn claims he is unusually fair “for an American,” one whose “skin was always in my own country thought to be one of the finest and whitest;” however, the difference between his skin tone and that of an average Symzonian is staggering: Seaborn says, quite bluntly, that “I was not a white man, compared with him,” a revelation which is “truly mortifying” (Seaborne 110).

Such (self-)mortification is found throughout the central utopian episode of the text, as Seaborn feels great shame for his race and civilization (treated without much distinction) in comparison to the Symzonians. This abjection is simultaneously physical and cultural: just as the “beautiful natives” have a temperate nature and healthy diet and way of life reflected in their outward appearance—their skin tone, and powerful but compact musculature—so too does their civilization as a whole reflect the beautiful quality of the individuals who constitute it (Seaborne 107). They outstrip ‘External’ civilization—that is, Western civilization¹—in every respect: philosophy, governance, civil society, etc., except astronomy, where living on the outside of the world obviously gives

¹ Western civilization is the only one Seaborn bothers to mention; chauvinism we expect from him at this point. However, considering the way Symzonian society is laid out as an idealization of a classical, European model, and that the Symzonians share, as will be seen, European prejudices, it is unlikely they would be interested in other cultures if Westerners already fail to live up to their expectations.

Externals a distinct advantage. This matches the old conceit that the quality of people and their land are intrinsically linked, habitually used to designate both the lands and peoples explorers encountered as ‘wild,’ but here turned on its head. The great whiteness of the Symzonians is attributed to the soft, perpetual lighting that reaches into the internal world; and so the eternal day produces a people of light, that is, light-skinned and enlightened. All of the Symzonians’ environmental and physiological beatitudes reinforce each other.

Symzonia is, of course, a satire, and so the excessive perfection of its inhabitants in body and culture is part of the story’s comic surfeit—as is Seaborn’s incessant fawning over them, and his concomitant abnegation of himself and his culture, which make him into a sort of ideological flagellant. It is worth wondering whether another writer/character would take a different view of what must be the almost-perfect ivory tint of the Symzonians—whether it might not recall albinism, or even a deathly pallor. Such extreme whiteness is occasionally cast as menacing in literary texts later in the century—*Moby Dick*’s white whale, Bram Stoker’s *White Worm*, and the vampires that same author popularized. Nonetheless, within the framework of the novel, ‘whiteness’ is a positive quality—as Seaborn himself is esteemed amongst his countrymen for it—and the Symzonians represent its apogee.

Seaborn—and the theoretical European and European-descended readers to whom he addresses himself—are thus hoisted with their own petard when it comes to their notions of race. By the very ideological apparatus that designates lighter skin with inherent superiority, and darker with a more degenerate nature, which for centuries now has been used to justify the exploitation and domination over native peoples encountered by Europeans as part of a project on enlightenment, Europeans are displaced from the highest position in the racial echelon, forced to adopt a position of inferiority vis-à-vis Symzonian civilization, as performed in Seaborn’s subservient and supercilious attitude when amongst them. As the higher learning of Symzonian culture indicates, it is they who have the theoretical right to any project of enlightenment, which they briefly attempt on Seaborn’s person before their own racial fears lead them to cast the explorers out.

By the same token, they seem invulnerable to habitual European methods of conquest and subjugation. At first, Seaborn chooses to conceal his discovery for purely self-motivated reasons: to prevent rivals from undercutting the potential new trade routes he believes he has forged.² Never does he show concern for the Symzonians themselves; and while that may partly be due the self-centeredness the narrator displays throughout the text, it is safe to say that the Symzonians can protect themselves. They have no interest in trade, as they are self-sufficient for necessities and abjure needless, ostentatious wealth, shuttering themselves to economic penetration. Foreign elements, including the translations of the texts Seaborn has brought with him, are subjected to almost panoptical levels of control due to fears of contamination, so they are well-equipped against cultural infiltration. Finally, despite their peaceful nature, we know that their navy, though unarmed, is a match for European vessels, they possess an air force that contemporary European nations would not develop for another century, and an entire chapter is devoted to the ill-defined super-weapon which the Symzonians reluctantly deployed to end their conflict with the Belzubians, the sheer destructive nature of which has since acted like a nineteenth-century equivalent of a nuclear deterrent—any military action against them would be tantamount to suicide. For colonial powers who have always prevailed through technological superiority and exploiting native divisions (absent from Symzonia's communal polity), it is not that they have finally met their match, but indeed, that they have met their betters. As will be discussed, in keeping Symzonia secret, Seaborn isn't so much protecting them from the West, as he is protecting the West from them.

Reinforcing this sudden position of inferiority by European conceptions, the Symzonians themselves largely share the racial schemas of their barely-tolerated European guests. As with the European notion of race at this time, the Symzonian scheme is underpinned by pseudo-scientific sanction, legitimized

² Seaborn is also concerned that these rivals will appropriate the glory of the discovery, "affirm that we [Seaborn's crew] had never been there at all" and "call all those places by new names" instead of the ones Seaborn had bequeathed on the new lands (Seaborn 219). This concern over who gets to 'own' lands by naming them evidences the national, imperial motives behind such voyages of discovery—Seaborn particularly wishes to situate these discoveries as a display against the British.

within the context of the text. Individuals who fail to behave according to that polity's standards, "incorrigible and dangerous to society" because their overconsumption threatens the balance within Symzonian society, undergo a visible physical transformation due to their degenerate lifestyle: they "lose their fairness of complexion and beauty of form and feature," in addition to further psychological degradation due to "diseases of the body which enervate their faculties, inordinate passions which torture their minds" (Seaborne 132). "They become dark coloured, ill favoured, and mis-shapen men," a reverse metamorphosis from what they refer to as the "pure race"—the Symzonian *Übermensch* "able to lift three times as much as any of the degenerates, or to leap three times as high" (Seaborne 132-133). Moral transgressions are criminal, and the punishment is exile. Thus being a racial Other is inherently criminalized in Symzonian society. This is both a more immediate and observable kind of scientific racism; and, as a racial origin story, a darkness-as-punishment etiological myth similar to contemporary ideas explaining the inherent sub-humanity of Africans as the result of God's punishment of biblical Ham for his crimes, inherited by the race he was meant to have spawned.

So, too, do the Symzonians practice what Stoler, addressing European colonialists, calls "cultural hygiene" in their dealings with the racial Others emerging from their midst or visiting their shores, controlling and minimizing contact to prevent racial-behaviour contamination (Stoler 78, 89-90). Their racial criminals, as mentioned, are exiled to an internal continent near the North Pole; the American visitors are all, except the narrator, forbidden to leave their ship—quarantined, in other words, as carriers of the disease of racial Otherness—and, in the end, ordered to leave Symzonian because the ruling council believes "that the safety and happiness of his people would be endangered by permitting any further intercourse with so corrupt and degenerate a race" (Seaborn 197). The repeated use of 'intercourse' to describe contact and trade, as in the Best Man's steadfast notion that "[i]t would be (...) dangerous to his people (...) to hold intercourse with such a depraved, covetous and sordid people," as well as the "sensual appetites" and horrific bodyliness that the Symzonians ascribe to the Externals,

point towards a sexual lexicon by which this contamination is meant to occur, with all its implications of venereal disease and hierarchy-upsetting bi-racial children, a pre-eminent subject for making racism manifest (Seaborn 196, 202; Stoler 76, 91).

The problem lies not simply in the fact that Seaborn and his fellows are less white than the whiter-than-thou Symzonians; the American sailors are, as we have seen, “not white,” and the text provides a racial origin story that accounts for this displacement of once-white Europeans to the status of racial Other. The practice of exiling criminals to the lands bordering “the rim of the North Polar opening,” the entrance to the Internal World (and so exit to the External World), dates from antiquity, when large swathes of Symzonian society were corrupted through trade with an eventual enemy nation, the Belzubians (the Satanic resonances of the name are clear) (Seaborn 131). Indeed, the Symzonians first believe Seaborn to have been “of that outcast race,” but a religious gesture convinces them otherwise; Seaborn himself, however, is less sanguine: “the suspicion (...) darted through my mind, that we the externals were indeed descendants of this exiled race” (Seaborn 130). As proof, he offers up an Inuit custom described by the Arctic explorer Sir John Ross, here understood as a corruption of the standard Symzonian greeting (thus making the Inuit their cultural descendants), and “[t]he gross sensuality, intemperate passions, and beastly habits of the externals,” which match the behavioural profile of Symzonian exiles (Seaborn 134). As with the recently mentioned myth of Ham, this origin story places the onus of racial crime on a population, this time all humans living on the outside of the world, whites included; it also positions Symzonia and its people as the Ur-race from which all others (except perhaps the Belzubians?) spring, racial and cultural parents whose misbegotten children will never be able to rival them. Being the origin point of humanity also rings with religious significance, as Symzonia itself is beautiful enough, its people beatific enough, to be considered a kind of terrestrial Eden, from which our progenitors were cast out, and another Adam—our narrator Adam Seaborn—is again cast out

as still too contaminated by the racial markers of the origin sin of the Symzonian exiles.

Being ‘not white’ leads to being treated as ‘not white’ in an uncanny or ironic reversal of racial positions, and particularly in the context of the contemporary attitudes towards and treatment of blacks in the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century. We’ve already seen how the Symzonians’ own racial schemas echo colonialist attitudes; their fear of racial contamination leads them to keep the visiting Americans lodged on their vessel, at a distance from the city that is the heart of their civilization—in other words, segregated into their own quarters, away from the white sphere of domesticity, for ‘safety’ reasons. The only exception to this is Seaborn, of whom the Best Man holds “a favourable estimate, notwithstanding the corruption of [his] nature,” (Seaborn 198) and he is therefore allowed to come into the city, an in-between position of Other yet sufficiently civilized to be tolerated in proximity to themselves for his limited usefulness; Seaborn is, essentially, the Symzonians’ ‘house negro.’ This quality of Seaborn’s is largely ascribed to his ability to mimic his racial betters: he is first accepted by performing a religious gesture, to demonstrate shared belief in “a Supreme Being,” then attempts to replicate the corrupted greeting of the northern exiles encountered by Ross, finally catching on to the proper form “with the aptness of a monkey” (Seaborn 107-108). In relegating himself to the status of a primate being in his capacity to ‘ape’ the customs of his more civilized hosts, Seaborn also echoes the discourse of scientific racism—and prejudice generally—about blacks as more primitive forms of humanity, closer to primates, capable of being trained to imitate without ever fully being a civilized person.

This analogy between the sailors and blacks, particularly in the United States, is nowhere clearer than when Seaborn find himself threatened by the worst fate that can befall a racial Other, short of genocide: slavery. A Symzonian philosopher puts forward the notion (as Seaborn himself was almost certain of) that the visitors were descendants of the exiles, on account of their “dingy complexion” and “sensual habits” and other behavioural cues, and should be punished for that racial crime by indentured labour under “the most severe”

Symzonian citizens (Seaborn 177). Seaborn envisions “the horrors of a rice swamp,” where he and his fellows are “to be kept hard at work, poorly fed, and debarred from intercourse with the pure” in order that “their gross appetites might be scourged out” (Seaborn 177-178). The conditions of this agricultural hell are clearly patterned after the lives of plantation slaves, down to the inherent criminality of having a dark complexion and the patriarchal arguments, oft repeated by defenders of the institution in this period of rising abolitionism, that slavery was to the betterment of the moral and physical condition of the enslaved blacks. Seaborn is able to evade this fate only through a series of fabrications—arguing that his history textbooks are fiction, and inventing a large nation of depraved marauders at the North Pole (too powerful and technologically proficient to resemble the Inuit) who are the actual descendants of the exiles and/or Belzubians, and distinct from the race he springs from—and by arguing that his “dingy complexion” is merely the result of being “much sunburnt” “owing to [his] seafaring life” (178).³ Seaborn is essentially ‘passing,’ if not as white, then at least as something not too far removed (and to think that he is the “fairest” of his people); he can avoid slavery not by making any kind of argument against racial categories and worth, but only by upgrading his own status by pretending his skin tone is environmental rather than biological. The need for this early example of racial ‘passing’ also points to the genealogical tenacity of the racial crime. Early America produced terms such as ‘quadroon’ and ‘octoroon’, and would later develop the ‘one drop rule’ of the Jim Crow era, to keep any black ancestry in a person, no matter how far removed, as the marker of social position to be segregated from the ‘pure’ white. So too does any inheritance from the degenerate Symzonia exiles, no matter the thousands of years elapsed and any betterment in culture, still render those descendants racial criminals in Symzonian society.

³ This is, perhaps, only a half-lie; as Nelson points out, “[s]eamen are not, of course, notoriously white in complexion” (101), though Seaborn himself supposedly had a reputation for being whiter than his fellows.

Similar racial displacements take place in Poe's *Pym*, in two relatively distinct episodes: the encounter with the Tsalal islanders near the end of the book, and the encounter with the human-shaped figure at the conclusion of the narrative. *Pym*, and the Tsalal episode specifically, have been at the center of much of the debate surrounding Poe's attitudes towards race.⁴ It is generally acknowledged that Pym's account of the black islanders is deeply steeped in the worst sort of racial prejudices, as indeed is testified to by a near-constant refrain of pejoratives deployed against them from the minute the narrative meets them; they are savage and duplicitous, in Pym's view always biding their time until the best opportunity to murder the crew of the *Jane Guy*. What divides critics is whether Pym's opinions on the matter are also Poe's. Sidney Kaplan reads *Pym* as a racist fable that defends slavery as justified on the basis of the inherent ignorance of blacks, and conducted under divine sanction revealed by the Hebrew curse carved into the very cliffs of Tsalal (Harvey 144) while John Carlos Rowe reads the narration itself as the affirmation of (white) authorial power over (dark) chaos (Rowe 117-138). However, Harold Beaver argues that underlying the excessive racism of *Pym* is self-conscious irony (Harvey 148), an argument extended by Dana Nelson's analysis of Pym as a satirical critique of colonial discourse (Nelson 90-108), and Joan Dayan even reinterprets the curse in the rocks as directed not against a biblical 'black race,' but against the American South, for "the offence of slavery" (as quoted in Harvey 150).

Though by no means holding up Poe as a model of progressive racial thought, this work aligns itself with the latter critics in looking on *Pym* as a text whose surface reading belies a more nuanced perspective on the part of the author. As pointed out by Gerald Kennedy, Pym's own observations on the shapes in the chasm—which, he insists to Peters, are meaningless, natural formations—are contradicted by Poe's other, more editorial persona in this text, the nameless author of the *Note* that concludes the story; and this persona also connects the

⁴ See Harvey 143-150 and Kennedy 16, 26-27 for recent surveys of the relevant criticism of issues of race in *Pym*.

various colour-coded elements of the text to draw out what Kennedy calls a ‘taboo of whiteness’ that prevails on Tsalal (78). And yet the *Note*-writer is in error himself when he portrays a Manichean, white/black dichotomy that supposedly prevails at the South Pole (Nelson 102-103): among other things, Pym does find white-coloured arrowheads within the island’s ravines. *Pym* is a text riddled with such errors, and while this has at times been attributed to a rushed or careless writer, it can (more productively) been seen as deliberate undermining of the author’s omniscient authority: Pym’s perspective is his own, the *Note*-writer’s another, and none are fully correct (Kennedy 78). This allows for greater space in which it is possible to see past Pym’s prejudices about the islanders and understand the narrative from their own perspective.

Nelson and Kennedy have initiated such a project in their critical works. Nelson sees Pym as possessing “a dangerous blind spot” in his interpretation of the islanders; Kennedy is less kind, calling the narrator “a fool who cannot decipher the most obvious signs” and demonstrates “sustained stupidity” (Nelson 98; Kennedy 62, 69). Pym’s failures as a reader lead to the slaughter of the *Jane Guy* crew and are thus intrinsic to the perceived racial conflict of the episode. Pym assumes the islanders’ actions stem from intrinsic malice, testified to by their blackness. Yet other causes have been suggested: that the islanders are fully aware of what the sailors’ guns can do, and thus aware that they go armed everywhere they go, a potentially hostile act (Nelson 99; Kennedy 61); that the chieftain’s belief that the ship itself was alive and had been injured by an axe reflect an animist worldview which is inflamed when the sailors chop down local trees for timber, to the natives’ evident shock (Nelson 99, Kennedy 59); and finally, that the visitors continuously flaunt, and may themselves be a living transgression of, a cultural taboo against whiteness, made manifest in the way the islanders react to white objects like cloth, eggs and flour (Kennedy 58). But where Kennedy implies this taboo, viewed racially, contributed to the slaughter of the *Jane Guy* crew—“mistrust and hatred for the black natives” is met by “a reciprocal fear and loathing triggered by whiteness” (58)—I would argue instead

that the massacre is allowed to happen because the islanders view the sailors as *not* white.

The islanders' taboo is not a mild one. Pym observes that they dye their teeth black; obviously, to avoid containing anything white within them, much as white men considered even 'one drop' of black blood to be a foreign racial contaminant (the text makes no mention of whether and how the islanders adjusted the whites of their eyes). The *Jane Guy* crew "could not get [the natives] to approach several harmless objects—such as the schooner's sails, an egg, an open book, or a pan of flour" (Poe 529-530). When the carcass of an animal with "perfectly white" fur, cast onto the island by the explosion of the *Jane Guy*, is spotted by the islanders, they go from "absolute stupor ... to the highest pitch of excitement, and rushed wildly about ... with the strangest expressions of mingled horror, rage, and intense curiosity" (Poe 527, 547). As "none of them seemed willing to approach it," the corpse is symbolically marked off by a circle of stakes driven into the ground around it, and once done "the whole of the vast assembly rushed into the interior of the island, with loud screams of *Tekeli-li! Tekeli-li!*" (Poe 547). Nu-Nu, the islander whom Pym and Peters capture in their escape, "became violently affected with convulsions" after Pym's white handkerchief accidentally flaps into his face; when "[a] fine white powder" begins to fall over the canoe, "Nu-nu now threw himself on his face in the bottom of the boat, and no persuasions could induce him to arise" (Poe 559). When they approach a "white curtain" at the center of the pole, from which "pallidly white birds flew continuously" and whose "scream was the eternal *Tekeli-li!*" (Poe 560), Nu-Nu literally dies of fright.

The origin (or origins) of this anti-white taboo is unclear. We know that it has not always been so for the inhabitants of Tsalal, for Pym finds amongst the ravines "vast heaps" of "white arrowhead flints" (Poe 550-551), and though he tries to deny human craft in forming other possibly artificial features of the chasms (including the shapes of the ravines themselves), the arrowheads are never held to come from anything other than human manufacture. Clearly, at some point, the islanders had no issues working white stone; when the taboo came into

effect, they disposed of their white wares into these eventual middens. However, this only means that the island was inhabited first, and the taboo came later; it could still be of great antiquity. Perhaps fauna played a role in its emergence; en-route to Tsalal, the *Jane Guy* crew encounter “a gigantic creature of the race of the Arctic bear, but far exceeding in size the largest of these animals”—who, being a polar bear, of course has “perfectly white” wool (Poe 525). This “monster” (Poe 525), though provoked into attacking the sailors in this case, is a sizeable predator that could easily kill humans and terrify the islanders; a fear which transfers to the rest of the white-furred and -feathered fauna and eventually to any white material at all. The most likely scenario would entail a religious origin, centered on the immense, “shrouded human figure” characterized by “the perfect whiteness of the snow” which Pym encounters at the South Pole (Poe 560). Whereas a taboo “implies both the sacred, or consecrated, and the unclean, dangerous, or forbidden (...) holy and horrible at the same time” (Kennedy 74), the frightful power of this divinity-imbued figure resonates well with the theological sanction under which the *Note*-writer speculates the islanders live, as elaborated by Kaplan: the giant ‘letters’ carved into the rock spell out a divine curse against the dark race of Ham, in which schema black Tsalal is Hell and the white pole Heaven (Harvey 144-145).

Whatever the origin, there is no denying the extremity of the taboo, the deeply-embedded terror that it spawns. Yet an attentive reading of the text shows that this taboo is never applied to the European men *themselves*. Kennedy and Nelson point towards the reaction of the islanders to “the white race—from whose complexion, indeed, they appeared to recoil” (Poe 529) as demonstrating that “they avoid anything white” and “consider white to be as evil and dangerous” as the sailors do black (Nelson 96), but in doing so accept Pym’s assumption that the islanders view their visitors as members of a white race. The lightness of the sailors’ skin tone probably does factor into the islanders’ own colour-based worldview: if black is best, and white hateful, then things which are dark are better than things which are light; an inversion of the habitual European notion of racial/colour superiority. But the islanders never demonstrate to their visitors the

extremity of behaviour shown to things which are *literally* white. The islanders seem initially friendly and crowd around the visitors, in contrast to their horror at and refusal to approach white objects; never is the censuring cry of *Tekeli-li!* applied to them. The chief Too-wit, and the prisoner Nu-Nu, have no adverse reaction when they are touched by their visitors, compared to Nu-Nu's visceral revulsion when he is touched by white cloth, and the islanders' inability to touch the body of the white animal even to remove its offending (white) presence from their island. Just as Pym is evidently mistaken in many of his other ethnocentric assumptions about the natives and their culture, his belief that they are perceived as belonging to a 'white race' is not borne out by the facts of the narrative. That the islanders slaughtered their 'guests' can be ascribed to the motives shown above: the sailors' armed, aggressive presence, their violation of animist belief system, and because they are taboo-violators.⁵ But they are not living examples of the taboo themselves.

What Poe is doing here is quite subtle: buried under Pym's surface narrative along with other hints at what's really going on is a statement about the artificiality of the concept of race, or at least its dependence on culturally determined contexts. The Europeans see themselves as white, the islanders black; but the Tsalal natives, in whose worldview these coloured schemas are even more important than in European thought, define these terms literally, according to which the spectrum of beiges and pinks that make up the sailor's flesh tones cannot qualify as white. Pym's failure to recognize this may simply be part of why critics do not find the narrator himself particularly intelligent, or it may be Pym deliberately avoiding recognizing his lack of whiteness. After this episode, the very notion of race, and the Manichean colour dynamics of the locale, become destabilized. As Nelson notes, following the massacre of the *Jane Guy* crew Pym calls himself and Peters "the only living white men upon the island" (Poe 542)—suddenly making Peters, whom Pym previously and at length describes as

⁵ They violate the taboo at least insofar as they carry white objects. It is interesting to speculate, but impossible to determine, whether the islanders themselves are truly "jet black" as Pym describes them (Poe 528), since we know from their dyed teeth that they have knowledge of cosmetics. If that's the case, the sailors' relative pallor could be perceived as a failure to similarly darken themselves—another taboo violation.

deformed and savage owing to being the hybrid progeny of a white man and a Native-American woman, into a compatriot, illustrating the “arbitrary racial delineation” of the epoch’s so-called ‘scientific’ idea of race (Nelson 101). Too, the final trip to the pole is marked with imagery that tends to be grey rather than black and white per se—the twilight, the vapour, the ocean which has both a white hue and the darkness of depths (Nelson 102)—a colour that fits Peters’ half-white (thus grey) status, and even Pym’s own newfound status of not-white, as viewed by the islanders, and thus grey himself (albeit a light grey). Dirk Peters’ status as Pym’s best, constant ally can be seen in the tradition of the native helper and sidekick, but his relative valour and capability, and his ability to grasp the constructed nature of the ravines and the artefacts therein where Pym refuses to do so, also suggest that Poe is not only looking to complicate and expose the artificial boundaries of race, but too the habitual value system attached to it. This works for Tsalal, too: the islanders are even more purist about colour than Europeans, and the extent to which this behaviour manifests negatively casts aspersions on their segregated lifestyle. When one considers that the river which runs with differently-coloured strands of water that never intermingle lies on this ‘cursed’ island, it is easy to see why critics like Nelson and Dayan see the episode as a critique of American racial practices.

Pym’s (and his compatriots’) relative lack of whiteness does not only come up in interactions with the islanders, but also with the environment. When the “perfectly white” polar bear-like creature counter-attacks the sailors, they are faced with “destruction,” overmatched (Poe 525). It is interesting that it is Peters, generally not considered white and certainly not interested in advancing a claim to that status, who is capable of saving them from “this extremity” of danger—and, we add, colour (Poe 525). After escaping Tsalal, Pym encounters the “gigantic and pallidly white birds” that frighten Nu-Nu, and otherwise finds himself in an environment dominated by whiteness (Poe 560); this, after his own relative lack of whiteness has been illustrated by the episode on the island, and thus the environment serves as a constant reminder of what he wishes to be, but is not. Finally, as the concluding sentences of his recorded journey, he sees beyond the

white veil “a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow” (Poe 560).

This figure has received a multiplicity of interpretations—an iceberg, the prow of a vessel, optical illusion, delusion, Pym’s own white shadow, the metatextual presence of the author, an actual giant from a forgotten race, Death, an angel, divinities Christian and otherwise, literal emptiness, and more still (c.f. Kennedy 71; Poe 560ⁿ²). I do not propose here to offer an alternative explanation, or favour one of the above; what is of interest for this analysis is less the nature of the figure, than its features: human-like, giant, and perfectly white. Read literally, it is, like the Symzonians, the better specimen of the (white) race, whose greater physicality is concomitant with a skin tone that literalizes beliefs about racial superiority. Its appearance finishes both the narrative and the unwhitening of Pym, begun by the islanders’ indication that he was not literally white, combined with colour competition from the fauna and environment: if Pym could still believe that he (and his race) were nonetheless the *whitest humans*, even this last refuge is stripped away in the appearance of the overpoweringly white human figure. Between the two extremes of Tsalal’s black environment and the white pole, Pym must accept an intermediary position, the grey man, a racial compromise that runs counter to absolutist notions of racial purity. *Pym* damns the racially motivated narrator twice over, first by undermining racial categories by placing him in a spectrum of colour, and then presenting ‘true’ whiteness as an entity which Pym simply cannot compete against—it is impossible to rival its superlative nature.

As a final morsel of concordance, Nu-Nu and Pym both die in the same paragraph, albeit on different sides of the act of writing. Nu-Nu, of course, expires during the events themselves, overcome by his fear of whiteness. But Pym, after having written the above-quoted passage, suffers a “sudden and distressing death” which the *Note*-writer describes only as an “accident”; the remainder of his narrative supposedly lost with him (Poe 561). We observe, then, that as Pym had embarked upon a retrospective journey during the act of writing the events that

have befallen him, he dies, essentially, at the same point as his blackened captive, before the great shrouded figure. Nu-Nu's death came as a result of a suffusion of whiteness, contrasted to his own racial darkness; Pym, to be able to return to the United States and write the manuscript this far, obviously survived the initial encounter, but does not the second. The juxtaposition is symbolic: the suffusion of whiteness is fatal to both the 'non-whites.' Only Peters survives the perfectly white figure, just as only Peters could defeat the perfectly white bear, perhaps because Peters does not revisit the event the way Pym does through writing, but I would suggest because Peters has accepted a hybrid status and does not involve himself in colour ideologies. Nu-Nu and Pym are racial absolutists, in their respective ways, and the extremity of whiteness triggers the fatal fear of one and self-abnegation of the other; Peters has a more flexible ancestry and worldview that allow him to pass through extremities unmolested, or at least far less affected than those with invested ideas about colour.

The inversion of the typical value hierarchy attached to colour by the Tsalal islanders is echoed, though less directly, in the inversions amongst the Kosekin in De Mille's *Strange Manuscript*. On first sighting humans outside the encircling mountains, More describes them as "hideous" and "black"—"animated mummies" (De Mille 29). Though his companion attempts to articulate an 'apology' for their darkness ("the devil's not so black as he's painted" [De Mille 31]), fairly anti-racist for the period, the horrific fate this trusting friend suffers, dismembered and cannibalized, would seem to punish him for this viewpoint. More's relentlessly negative, animalistic portrayal of the natives ("creatures," "rats, cockroaches, earwigs, or serpents ... human vermin," "herd of monkeys, ... flock of wolves" [De Mille 31, 33, 37]) is a fully racialized condemnation. At first glance, this might seem like just one of innumerable encounters with cannibal savages in naval fiction; however, More eventually discovers that these particular 'savages' not only belong to the Kosekin civilization, but are its most admired members—at the height of their inverted hierarchy of poverty. As with the Kosekin love of darkness and hatred of light, the highest members of the society are themselves dark, with fair-skinned More and Almah eventually occupying the

lowest (from the Kosekins' viewpoint) possible rung of society. This is not an overt racial scheme to the Kosekin⁶, but the symbolic import of the colour concordance is clear. More's whiteness is not at question in this story; however, the value system that underpins racial colour hierarchies is. More is confronted by the equal certitude of the Kosekin in the rightness of their worldview as he presumably is in his; however, More's ability to recognize and disagree with the ideology of his hosts (unlike blind Pym and sycophantic Seaborn) also lessens the 'danger' in this rival scheme upsetting received racial notions, as does the extremities of satire that seeks to mark everything the Kosekin do and think as rather ludicrous.

It is worth noting that 'normal' Kosekin have a "complexion and general outline of features ... not unlike Arabs, but they were entirely destitute of that hardness and austerity which the latter have" (De Mille 54). As with the Symzonians, the blackness of the paupers is a characteristic that can emerge over a single lifetime, though here arising from deprivation rather than excess; it is here again associated with degeneration from a fairer state, and exile, though unlike the Symzonians (and the *Pym* islanders, if one accepts the supposition that they are the cursed descendants of Ham), the Kosekin paupers are voluntary exiles. Whether blackness is associated with crime depends on the viewpoint; the Kosekin surely don't think so, but it is More's perspective with whom the audience is invited to sympathize, and he most assuredly blames them for what he sees as crimes against nature: ritual sacrifice and cannibalism.

THE ORIENTAL CONNECTION

Pym and *Manuscript* are among a number of polar texts that look to establish some kind of link, tenuous as it may often be, between the polar regions and the Middle East; somewhat surprising, since from a geographic viewpoint the

⁶ Indeed, while the Kosekin do have a notion of race, as revealed when the Kohen acknowledges that More and Almah "are both of a different race from us," (De Mille 120), they do not seem to attach value judgments to such categories. A person's worth is determined by behaviour and lack of wealth, and More is promoted or demoted in their society to the extent that they believe he is acting in accordance with their cultural precepts. This value-less notion of race may be another way of mocking More's highly racist attitude, or the frame readers' obsession with locating the Kosekin in a racial genealogy (and thus hierarchy).

poles are at the furthest remove from what is often considered the middle of the world. This can, in part, be attributable to the general popularity of orientalism during the nineteenth century, a way to spice up already striking locales with known, but exotic, foreign elements. However, there are also racial and religious connotations in these motions towards both biblical-era and contemporary Middle East. Pym's *Note*-writer tries to trace possible linguistic origins of the symbols Pym had dismissed, and believes that they are written, variously, in Ethiopian (Ethiopian/Cushite, per Kaplan), Arabic and Egyptian, to which Kaplan adds Babylonian—groups who have variously been regarded as descendants of Ham, and thus bearers of his divine curse (Harvey 144). There are three sets of symbols, which are meant to signify, respectively, “to be shady,” “to be white,” and “the region of the south” (Poe 562-563). Kaplan goes on to designate the fragments of the Tsalal islanders' language as “a kind of pidgin Hebrew” (Harvey 144), though other critics have suggested Polynesian origin, ranging from Maori to Hawaiian, which is then mixed in with Hebrew and Arabic (Poe 527-528ⁿ⁵, 547ⁿ⁵). These linguistic roots, along with a string of Old Testament references to Babylon and other enemies of the Judaic people, are seen by Kaplan as reinforcing the racial crime of the islanders, whose cursed nature is inscribed in the very rocks; they are “a degenerate, cursed remnant of the Chosen” (Harvey 144), and thus, much like the races spawned from the Symzonian exiles, examples of once-white/pure men who have become racial Others for their sins. The theological sanction of this transformation all the more highlights the fear Seaborn, Pym and others feel on discovering that they are themselves being racially Othered (rendered non-white) in their polar adventures.

It has already been mentioned that De Mille's Kosekin are largely Arab in appearance, according to our narrator; More's paramour Almah, comes from a different 'race,' whose “complexion was much lighter (...) and reminded me of those Oriental beauties whose portraits I had seen in annuals and illustrated books” (De Mille 73-75)—explicitly referencing not only the contemporary Orientalist fascination, but also the textual means by which it was propagated. The Kosekin's cave-loving lifestyle and resultant vision troubles in sunlight

remind More of “the miserable fellahin of Egypt” (De Mille 55). But similarities extend beyond the phenotypical: Dr. Oxenden remarks that while More thought “these words [of the Kosekin language] had an Arabic sound,” to him they seem “still more like Hebrew!” (De Mille 150) He goes on to designate the language as “Aryan,” for “[i]t is impossible for an autochthonous people to have such a language,” and concludes “that the Kosekin are a Semitic people. Their complexion and their beards show them to be akin to the Caucasian race” (De Mille 152). Sceptical journalist Melick jokingly offers two contradicting explanations for their presence at the South Pole, first that “[t]he Kosekin are the lost Ten Tribes [of Israel],” then supposing that “Shem landed there from Noah’s ark, and left some of his children to colonize the country” (De Mille 152-153). Melick’s proposals satirize the tendency to search for biblical origins in the cultures encountered during European expansion, real and imagined, as was the case, for instance, in the *Note*-writer’s reading of Pym’s memoir, which is certainly one the *Strange Manuscript*’s literary progenitors (De Mille 274*n*, 278*n*). Although the Kosekin are not ‘cursed,’ at least not in the external, divine sense applied to the Tsalal islanders, their racial origins are nonetheless used to explain their divergent behaviour. Oxenden expands at length a hypothesis by which the Kosekin would have inherited their cave-dwelling habits from a highly fanciful account of an Arabian tribe of Troglodytes who “once inhabited the shores of the Red Sea, both on the Arabian and Egyptian side” and had oddly jovial (to Oxenden) mourning habits (De Mille 153-154). Also, “the strong spirituality of the Semitic race [who] more than all others thought little of this life, and turned their affections to the life that lives beyond this” is at the root of the Kosekin death-cult (De Mille 235-236).

It is worthwhile to ask why these biblical and/or Semitic allusions seem to recur around these journeys to the pole, in addition to the Adamic tropes studied in the previous chapter. In part, the colour-coded nature of the polar environment, the massive amounts of whiteness and the light/darkness dualism suggested in the lengthy cycle of day and night, would lend the Ant/Arctic to questions of colour symbolism and thereupon to race, particularly when the narrative strongly

features indigenous populaces as is the case for the three texts we've been looking at. Questions of race, at this time, were inevitably tied up with questions of theology as "the main pillar of the proslavery defense"—particularly relevant for our American authors—and, once the slavery issue 'resolved,' continued to operate as a means of supporting scientific racism (Harvey 144). Newly encountered racial groups must be made to fit into either—or preferably both—of the pre-existing schemas of biblical, Noahic racial descent and contemporary biological notions of race, and so these myths or supposedly scientific schemes of philology become the touch-stones by which characters make comprehensible their unfamiliar environments. And if the intent was ever to upset received notions of race, it helps to give relatively clear delineations first—sympathetic with the likely worldview of contemporary readers—before working to undermine them.

This colour-code, which had longed implied that dark people came from dark places, had an interesting question to answer with regard to Ant/Arctic fiction: in traveling to white places, do we encounter white people? *Symzonia* offers an emphatic 'yes,' De Mille answers with a half-affirmative—the Kosekin are 'Caucasian,' albeit a far-flung, darker branch—and *Pym* wants to say entirely otherwise, although even with *Pym* it is rather the invention of a darkened environment that allows the presence of darkened people; when finally venturing into the whiteness of the pole, Pym does encounter, after all, that white human-shaped figure. So there is a desire that the locals be connected to 'white men,' however distantly, and the best time to place the divergence is in biblical times and the post-Flood moment of theological multiracial genesis. Even the Tsalal islanders, if read as cursed, degenerate members of the Chosen, share common ancestry in their origin from the 'middle' of the world. White men are thus encountering 'themselves,' although since a tale without peril doesn't work well outside the utopian genre of *Symzonia*, such self-encounters are also racial

warnings of what happens if white men fail to maintain their scriptural integrity: degeneration, curse and inversion.⁷

There is also, as discussed, something of a regressive temporal element to polar travel, where going forward in space is equal to going backwards in time, only instead of a return to the original vacuum and the moment of Creation as in *Frankenstein* and *The Purple Cloud*, journeys to inhabited areas arrive at a somewhat later moment in western culture's perceived past, prehistoric and/or biblical. This is not unique to polar narratives, it must be said, but to blank spaces more generally: Verne's *Voyage au centre de la Terre* marked inwards travel as temporal travel to subsequent geological eras; Arthur Conan Doyle found prehistory in *The Lost World* of an Amazonian plateau, and Haggard's Quatermain uncovered *King Solomon's Mines* in Africa. Like Verne, many of these polar narratives are also inwards journeys, geologically speaking: Seaborn passes through an opening at the pole into a hollow earth; Pym sights what has often been interpreted as a similar chasm at the end of the *Narrative*, and More undergoes a lengthy underground journey to emerge in a land bounded by mountains. And all must pass through the globe-like 'icy hoop' previously discussed. This past-wards motion is most obvious in the case of Adam More, who finds a semi-tropical, prehistoric world at the pole⁸; the juxtaposition of these creatures with Kosekin society, and the frame-scientists' tracing of Kosekin genealogy to ancient Semitic tribes and contemporaries of ancient Greek commentators make More's journey one to both a cultural as well as a biological past. It was not uncommon, after all, for Europeans to view non-European polities as examples of their own history, frozen in time by the darker races' supposed inability to progress, bound as they were by innate and/or environmental (climatic) impediments. Pym certainly views the Tsalal islanders through such a lens, culturally suffocated by their isolation and inherent savagery. Even the

⁷ *Symzonia*, as mentioned, changes locations around somewhat, by substituting itself as Ur-progenitor instead of the Middle-East, but nonetheless presents a kind of self-encounter.

⁸ It bears mentioning that contemporary science when De Mille wrote the book wouldn't have given many counter-indications that dinosaurs and related species never cohabited with humans, although the science was already firming up by the time the *Strange Manuscript* was published *post-mortem*.

Symzonians, though far more technologically advanced than Europeans in most aspects, have a 'retro' feel to them, as the culture is deeply steeped in the type of utopianism of *The Republic*, and brings to mind classical Greece in tone, dress and other aspects of their society. The latter is evidently not a biblical or Middle-Eastern allusion, but another example of the inclination for past-wards motion that partly accounts for the preponderance of such features.

If the mythic past of the Middle-East frequently comes into play, so too does a more contemporary form of Orientalism occasionally appear in these texts. Seaborn, on first arriving in Symzonia, recalls a visit to "a sublime sovereign of the Mussulman empire" and the etiquette that was expected of him there; "[h]appily [he] recalled to [his] mind those weighty matters" (such as not removing his hat) and in so doing avoids giving the Symzonians offence (Seaborn 106). That Seaborn should turn to the Islamic world for etiquette advice is all the more puzzling in that he had already linked these people with those Ross had encountered at the North Pole—a far cry from the Middle-East and Africa; it seems that to Seaborn's mind, on this initial contact at least, one exotic civilization is the equivalent of another. Shortly thereafter, Seaborn seats himself "like a Turk" (Seaborn 109); he is already beginning to feel the sting of racial inferiority before the Symzonians' culture and his suspicions about his racial origins, and 'downgrades' himself accordingly by linking himself with a culture perceived as being a step below white, European civilization. The shift in who, between Seaborn and the Symzonians, occupies the position of the Oriental in this meeting occurs very rapidly, and its likely catalyst is Seaborn's discovery of how much whiter than he his interlocutors are.

Examining Orientalism in *Frankenstein*, Joseph Lew finds that most of it is directed outwards, projected onto the Monster or the journeys character undertake. Of particular note are the actual Turks in the story—Safie, and her unseen family. In Safie's dead mother, Lew considers "that this Oriental family ... is the image of Mary Shelley's own," with the Turk standing in for William Godwin, such the novel represents "the bourgeois nuclear family in Oriental drag" (281-283). Victor Frankenstein, too, briefly indulges in self-Orientalising,

comparing himself to Sindbad—“the Arabian who had been buried with the dead” (Shelley 53; Lew 256). After falling into depression after creating the Monster, he finds “consolation in the works of the Orientalists” introduced to him by Clerval, an aficionado of eastern languages (Shelley 70; Lew 262). Victor finds that their “melancholy is soothing,” lining up with his own mental state at this point—he wishes to be more like indolent figures of these texts than the “manly and heroic” protagonists in the “poetry of Greece and Rome” whom the narrative will eventually force him to become, chasing the Monster into the far north (Shelley 70).⁹

Adam Jeffson, too, Orientalizes himself. On discovering the depopulated world, he wonders to himself: “Into what kind of creature shall I writhe and change?” (Shiel 97) That ‘creature,’ he eventually answers, is the racial Other, and the transmutation takes place in “the reclusion and dim mystery of Orient homes,” more specifically the Turkish Embassy in London (Shiel 133). That this represents an abasement even to himself is clear by his description of “fierce-looking Caucasians in skins of beasts”—as with De Mille, ‘the Arab’ is acknowledged as both cousin to, and the savage reflection of, the European—whose “brown mortality [is] more abominable still than the Western’s” (Shiel 133). In comparing himself to famed tyrants of Orientalist lore like Sennacherib (another biblical allusion) and Sardanapalus, he makes his cultural transvestism more than just a change in clothing and appearance, but a revolution in character from a rational Englishman to the despotic Oriental. In a depopulated world, Jeffson is the sole exemplar of any race, and one may think that would lead to a collapsing of the notion of race, as there is nothing to define oneself against; yet, to a large extent, the old schemes of racial and cultural schemes are perpetuated by Jeffson taking on the role of the Other himself: becoming the opposition to a dead culture in his self-loathing. Dead culture, but perhaps living theology: Jeffson is intent on teaching Leda that “White Power shall not prevail” (Shiel 235), by which Jeffson refers to the divine principle, but—as the later adoption of

⁹ Nor do we fail to note that Victor, in his infirmity, rejects ‘manliness.’ As mention in the previous chapter, illness feminizes the character, and once again that female-gendered passivity is linked to an Oriental lifestyle.

the expression by racists groups demonstrate—is fraught with racial implications. Jeffson’s opposition to whiteness is manifest physically by embracing the role of the racial Other. It is only after Jeffson has found another “creature” in the form of Leda, who has an “ivory-brown colour” due to her own Middle-Eastern heritage combined with spending most of her life underground, that Jeffson begins—terribly slowly—to make his way back to the European, in vestments and thought. Just as the existence of a woman allowed him to reclaim his masculinity, the existence of an Other permits him to, gradually, become white again.

Jeffson’s self-Othering is also a variation on the pandemic colonial fear of ‘going native.’ As defined by Ashcroft et al., this was the contamination of the European by the native populace (whom- and wherever that may be), particularly sexually (as per Stoler), resulting in the degeneracy that features in the transformation of the Symzonian exiles and Kosekin paupers; but this phenomenon can also—and in realist texts, is more likely to—be expressed behaviourally. Jeffson does not merely dress the part of the Oriental despot, he also behaves as one, spending long periods in indulgences sensual and destructive, trying to accrue to himself the lifestyle of a sultan, complete with his obsessive palace-building project. Adam More, too, finds that to avoid death he has no choice but to integrate himself into Kosekin society, also adopting a lifestyle akin to a potentate—although this comes with the caveat that More never embraces Kosekin ideology, but rather finds a way of (condescendingly) manipulating their worldview to afford himself the standard of living he desires while still resisting their cultural precepts.

Beyond sex and lifestyle, however, a pre-eminent marker of the “distinction between ‘civilized’ and ‘savage,’ as Levi-Strauss reminds us in *The Raw and the Cooked*” is diet, and no aspect of diet, including the supposed regimen of “raw flesh” and blubber that gave the Inuit the name “Esquimaux” is more affecting and sensational than “cannibalism itself” (Hill 121). Charles Dickens may be taken for the majority of his contemporaries in England and the West more generally when, in his collection of cannibalistic episodes, he characterizes “cannibalism as the realm of the ‘nonwhite,’” looking to discount

incidents of “white cannibalism” (always on the part of other European nationalities than the English) as the result of “madness and criminality”, with the reverse implication that cannibalism amongst other ‘races’ stems from their inherent barbarity (H.L. Malchow, as quoted in Hill 126). More than anything else, it is the Kosekin’s occasional cannibalistic rites that cause More’s unrelenting horror towards them, and he expresses the view that it is completely unnatural to him—a biologically-ingrained incompatibility between cannibalism and the white man. And yet this is certainly not the case for Pym: in a controversial episode of the story, Pym, Peters and Pym’s friend—shipwrecked for weeks—kill and eat a fourth sailor (elected via lottery, for an appearance of civility; and who first raised the proposal and tried to kill Pym to that purpose, for an appearance of karmic justice). This horrific (yet quickly forgotten by Pym) scene has been seen by critics from a variety of viewpoints, religious, imperialist and otherwise; it is sufficient to our purposes here to mention that, accoutrements of civility aside, Pym’s actions align him far more with the ‘despicable savages’ encountered in maritime literature than their usual heroes. And, despite Pym’s selective memory, it also works to place Pym below the Tsalal islanders, whom he hypocritically excoriates to no end: they may be killers, but Pym is both killer and cannibal.

Of the texts under consideration, however, it is the Dickens/Collins collaboration *The Frozen Deep* which most thoroughly engages with the trope of ‘going native’ and cannibalism—ironically, by never mentioning it at all. This lack of overt reference had made critics reluctant to see these themes in the play, but as Brannan and Hill have described, the debate over whether the Franklin expedition resorted to cannibalism before they were finally wiped out was very much part of the background against which the play was put together, as indeed the Prologue refers to the “heroic men” of Arctic expedition, where “PARRY conquer’d and FRANKLIN died” (Collins & Dickens 97; Hill 130). Dickens’ approach to the subject is reminiscent of the artistic practice of ‘negative space,’ by which instead of presenting a darkened figure against a white background, instead the space around the figure is blackened while the subject remains

blank—in much the same way as the white, snowy high Arctic of the second act is wedged between the gloom of the English country-house and the Newfoundland coast in the first and third acts. Cannibalism is the unmentioned heart of the text, its shape only made apparent by the background. At the same time, there is irony in the metaphor insofar as Dickens, in the previous writings discussed above, had strenuously sought to depict cannibalism as a black phenomenon from which the figure of the white man stands apart. There is certainly symbolic resonance to the degree that *The Frozen Deep* is a story all about absence—the anxious absence of the male relatives in the first act, the fearful absence of provisions in the second, and the suspenseful absence of Wardour and Aldersley until the very end of the third act—and at the metafictional level, about the prized absence of white cannibalism.

The extreme civility of the Englishmen, even on the brink of death from exposure, sickness and deprivation, is Dickens' literary counter-argument to the accusations of cannibalism made against the Franklin expedition just as much as his attempts to debunk Rae's claims in *Household Words*¹⁰. In the play, it is Wardour who finds himself in moral peril—representing the collectivity of lost Arctic sailors—but this peril is notably transmuted to an emotional rather than physical one, as Wardour finds himself alone on the ice with Aldersley, whom Wardour hates for being engaged to Clarissa, the woman he has long loved. The play threatens murder; the context—the Franklin expedition—threatens cannibalism: the morally compromised Wardour may go even further and devour his foe in order to stay alive on the ice. Wardour's last appearance in the third act characterizes him as “*clothed in rags; his hair is tangled and grey*”: a wild man, barely recognizable as a European (Collins & Dickens 155). There are frequent references to Wardour as “*a man whose reason is shaken*,” along with his semi-coherent dialogue; he is frequently called “mad” due to being “conscience-stricken” by Crayford, who recognizes his shipmate and suspects a murder (Collins & Dickens 155, 157). This accusation of madness needs to be read in the context of Dickens' claim in his articles that only madness could account for acts

¹⁰ For a discussion of this correspondence, see Brannan 12-20 and Hill 119-126)

of cannibalism by white men; Wardour suggesting that the rescue party “throw [him] some bones from the table” for him to gnaw on further threaten the idea that his diet is demonstration of a terrible devolution in character (Collins & Dickens 155). In appearance and behaviour, Wardour reminds us of the various ‘white’ men, like the Symzonian exiles who, for their apparent crimes, degenerate into racial Others—indeed, Crayford insists on characterizing the mad Wardour as a criminal until he returns with the still-living Aldersley: his appearance is proof enough of guilt. Once his name is cleared, however, Wardour is able to make himself understood by the other Englishmen—“[m]y mind clears” once the suspicion of racial crime is dismissed (Collins & Dickens 160). Wardour’s wild appearance is transformed from one of racial transgression to a sign of Christ-like suffering; the Arctic is the barren desert in which Wardour undergoes temptation by “the Devil,” overcomes it, and finally sacrifices himself for his fellow man (Collins & Dickens 159). Though Dickens certainly did not intend it as an anti-racist critique, considering his recorded opinions about other ‘races,’ the short distance between monstrous wild-man and god-touched prophetic saviour problematizes the reliability of judging a person’s character on the external features of their appearance. It speaks to the necessity of context; and where this context is situational rather than culturally-determined, we are finally asked, as *Pym* does for the islanders, to view the events of the narrative from the perspective of the ‘savage,’ or else we will never comprehend the full story.

PART III: POLAR MIRAGES:
THE UNCERTAIN SHAPE OF THE STORY

Without getting bogged down in questions of authorial intentionality and its attendant difficulties, it is necessary to ask how much of these exaggerations—and implied criticisms—of the figure of the white male explorer and the related culture are deliberately seeded into these texts, and how much emerges inadvertently from the psychic tensions these texts touch upon. Our satires, *Symzonia* and *Strange Manuscript*, are evidently chiding, but are the targets properly the societies characters have encountered or those left behind—if not both? It is generally agreed upon that Mary Shelley was deeply interested in many of the social issues her work raises, particularly insofar as some of her characters have been read as stand-ins for members of her own radical entourage, a chance to work out their personalities and ideas through fiction; critiques, then, are only natural. Conversely, Charles Dickens' letters and articles clearly demonstrate how earnest he was in his beliefs about the inherent, superior nobility of the English sailor compared to other races and nationalities¹—the anxieties about masculinity and whiteness are something we retrospectively read into the text, not something Dickens himself would have wanted to communicate. Plumbing authors' attitudes towards social issues like race and gender can be confused by an apparently contradictory surfeit of information—as is the case in the long-running debate over the extent of Poe's racism (or anti-racism)²—or, equally, by a lack or imprecision of data, as with M.P. Shiel's biography³. In many cases, divining

¹ As part of his campaign to undermine the credibility of Rae's account of the Franklin expedition's purported cannibalism, Dickens attacked the character of the Inuit who had heard from another group about finding the ship, calling them "covetous, treacherous and cruel," for instance (Brannan 15). For further discussion of Dickens' treatment of race in writings leading up to the genesis of "Frozen Deep", see Brannan 14-17, 19 and Hill 122-126.

² Summaries of the relevant body of criticism can be found in Harvey 143-150 and Kennedy 16, 26-27.

³ Shiel's attitudes towards masculinity and femininity stand to have been influenced by the possibility that he was "a physical culture nut, reportedly homosexual" as some would have it (Hartwell, as quoted in Aldiss 145), or a womanizer as has otherwise been suggested. Likewise, widely-acknowledged racism—particularly towards Jewish and Asian peoples—is potentially complicated by his own racial background, as "[h]is mother may have been a mulatto and freed slave" (Aldiss 145), and therefore his racism might have stemmed from a kind of self-hatred for the Other within himself. Certainly this possibility resonates with the narrative of *The Purple*

what social motivations lie behind a text (if, indeed, the authors overtly acknowledged any such motive at the time of writing, even if only to themselves) remains largely guesswork.

Setting aside any possible social agenda for the moment, these displacements of gender and racial identities do serve important generic functions within the texts. Exaggeration lies at the heart of satire; where Swift, the master satirist of travel narratives, had Gulliver encounter exaggeratedly large and small human populations in Lilliput and Brobdingnag, Seaborn has his explorer encounter an exaggeratedly white population, whose many other extremes of strength and culture form the book's comic locus. Likewise, from the remove of their pleasure yacht, the four interstitial readers of the *Strange Manuscript* treat the narrative as an object to amuse them on their becalmed boat. The audience is invited to laugh along with the acerbic journalist Melick as he mocks the gullibility and pontificating of his fellows. The gentlemen's theories on the Kosekin's racial origins, and the flora, fauna and geography of the alleged tropical land at the South Pole, come under Melick's sardonic scrutiny: "there is no theory," he says, "however wild and fantastic, which some man of science will not be ready to support and to fortify by endless argument, all of the most plausible kind" (De Mille 70). Lengthy hypotheses based on philology, history and ethnography are followed by jokes at their expense and wild scenarios (such as troglodytes migrating across the southern oceans on the backs of Pterosaurs), highlighting the sophistry and absurdity lying beneath the other men's seemingly careful explanations.

If *Strange Manuscript*'s metafictional frame highlights its satirical aspects, the 'inner' text seeks to shock more than amuse, relying more on the generic conventions of horror. The transition between these modes of experience is smoother than one might think. Although satire and horror aim to produce diametrically opposed emotional states—amusement and dread—they serve a

Cloud, marked by the protagonist's figurative transformation from white man to Other (read as degeneration and madness) and back again (read as salvation); and our narrator's litany of faults and repeated self-flagellations certainly seem like they come from the pen of a man familiar with self-loathing! For more about Shiel's background, see Harold Billings' recent biography, *M.P. Shiel: A Biography of His Early Years*.

similar function; both make the familiar strange, and in doing so cast new perspective on the assumed, the first through comedic exaggeration, the other through uncanny displacement. (Science-fiction, another frequent genre in these texts, also uses this kind of alienation, but features cognitive estrangement rather than the emotional estrangement of the other two genres here discussed.) Any story that sells itself under the rubric of horror or the gothic needs to incorporate shocking elements into the narrative; a horror story that does not frighten or disturb has missed its mark. These elements can be overtly related to race and gender, such as the existential threat that Victor perceives in the Monster as a new species, or the aura of the grave that surrounds female bodies like the female Monster and in Victor's dream. In cases such as this, or the emphasis on the blackness of the Tsalal islanders, the Other serves in a habitual role of bogeyman, whose surface differences expose a perilously corrupt inner nature.

The sometimes subtler reversals of expected racial and gender patterns this project has highlighted also provide the disquiet or jolt the horror genre requires. In a culture where the intrinsic superiority of the white race and male sex were deeply held beliefs, upsetting or outright inverting expected hierarchies was one means of building sensationalist scenarios. Adam Jeffson's Orientalist transformation helps communicate to contemporary readers how far this last man has sunk into madness, while Adam More's emasculating position of subservience to Layelah represents a dangerous scenario—women in authority—also at the heart of similar pulpy plots like H. Rider Haggard's infamous *She*.⁴ Less obvious reversals and threats still speak to the cultural anxieties of the period, as Jen Hill has shown regarding the palpable absence of cannibalism in *The Frozen Deep*: though “there are no overt references to cannibalism in the text ... due to Dickens' debate with Rae, Arctic exploration and cannibalism remained linked in the public mind” (130). Hill reminds us that the images of the cannibal—and, by extension, most elements of horror—contain a duality of

⁴ That such stories would accrue under a female monarch, and *She* specifically would be published the same year as Queen Victoria's golden jubilee has certainly not escaped scholarly notice as regards to themes of female authority. See, for instance, Adrienne Munich's discussion of *She* in *Queen Victoria's Secrets*, 198-201.

“attraction and repulsion” in providing a ‘safe’ mechanism to experience the forbidden and/or terrifying, which creates a “voyeuristic pleasure [in] reading” such stories (Hill 127), a voyeurism similar to the sort created by melodrama—the theatrical tradition of sensation in which *The Frozen Deep* finds comfortable niche. Yet at the same time “[h]orror ... reassures readers by reaffirming their place in opposition to the cannibal” (Hill 127)—or the Monster, the Tsalal savages, the inverted values of the Kosekin, etc. Horror teaches by counter-example, whether the savage, opposite Other, or the protagonist who is shown to lack critical qualities of whiteness or masculinity. The appeal of the transgressive—the desire for the forbidden—lures in readers, but the simultaneous, paradoxical *undesirability* of what is being portrayed “worked to shape, regulate, and stabilize social identities.” (Hill 131) Such works present alternative schemas of race and gender, usually in a negative fashion, and by so doing concretize abstract theory into a tangible scenario which can be experienced and rejected, all without the need for the real aches that would come with social transformation.

FATA MORGANA: UNCERTAINTY THROUGH NESTED NARRATIVE

Adam Seaborn, both author and character, is a man deeply concerned with optics. The original, 1820 edition of *Symzonia* begins with a plate (and accompanying legend) detailing the angle of the sun and moon at the poles and their penetration through the supposed openings there, along with the breadth of the internal world that receives direct or reflected light. These schemes, along with some complex and fanciful calculations, are how Seaborn justifies to his disgruntled crew his belief that the waters of the South Pole are warm. Amidst these dubious exhortations, he cites “the testimony of Barentz, a Dutchman, who wintered in Nova Zembla” and “found the sun to rise (...) fifteen days sooner than was expected” (Seaborn 40). Seaborn refers here to an expedition of late sixteenth-century Arctic explorer Willem Barentsz to Novaya Zemlya (using anglicized names), where the eponymous Novaya Zemlya effect was first

recorded. High atmospheric refraction makes a reflection of the sun appear above the horizon, which Arctic explorers mistook for the sun itself.

This was just one of the many mirages and optical illusions and tricks of light—inverted images, *Fata Morgana*, *hillingar*⁵—which troubled the perceptions of Arctic and Antarctic explorers, and as the above example shows, made their way from the explorers' accounts into the Ant/Arctic fiction of the time, to varying degrees of accuracy. J. Lasley Dameron, examining *Pym*, finds that many of the wondrous sights Pym encounters in the extreme south, which lend his narrative an increasingly supernatural aura, may simply be an uninformed (and melodramatically-inclined) observer's account of natural arctic phenomena. This supposition relies on Poe's familiarity with the writings of the Arctic explorer William Scoresby⁶, who described 'veined' waters (the distinct colors are actually blooms of animalcules), the appearance of vapour linked to the auroras, and ash-like snow crystals (Dameron 39-42). He finds the giant human figure of Pym's conclusion akin to Scoresby feeling that "one mass [of ice] resembled a colossal human figure" (Dameron 42). Whatever the source of the phenomena, these mirages lend an air of uncertainty to the polar environment; the self-doubt attached to one's own perceptions perfectly complements the alluring unknown of those blank spaces on the map, and the mysteries surrounding vanished expeditions like Franklin's.

The generation of uncertainty in a narrative—primarily dramatic suspense—is, like the shock value of racial and gender displacement, another selling point for a story, particularly for the adventure and horror genres. And uncertainty within the text, about the 'reality' of what the story presents even within its own fictional world, functions to curtail the questions about race and gender that the story might raise. I mentioned above how these social displacements can serve to reinforce normative views of society through contrast with a negative alternate. However, such contrast also means acknowledging the

⁵ For a discussion of such phenomena accessible to the layperson, see Simpson-Housley, *Antarctica: Exploration, Perception, Metaphor* 45-49.

⁶ Aficionados of contemporary Arctic fiction will recognize the name as the inspiration for the character of far-north balloonist Lee Scoresby in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

existence of alternative ways of structuring race and gender, even if only to condemn them. There is another possible ‘solution’ to the displacements featured in these narratives, and that is to introduce doubt about the fictional scenarios *prima facie*. In so doing, questions these stories introduce about the assumed superiority of the white male explorer find themselves contained within a broader set of narrative questions, one form of uncertainty being used to curtail the threat of the other. Within these texts, some of the common features by which this curtailment is achieved include generic expectations, the use of frames and nested narratives, and acts of omission and rewriting.

It was previously suggested that gender and racial displacement within these texts serve generic functions; the acerbic contrast of satire, the shock of horror, the novelty of science-fiction. However, even as generic conventions enable the possibility of alternate social constructions, those same expectations also function as a means of containment. By imagining either the landscape of the poles, and/or strange creatures that end up there, most of these texts fall into what will be later termed speculative fiction. It is no secret that many such genres have wound up ghettoized, at a remove from mainstream criticism or perhaps dismissed as ‘mere’ entertainment; to give serious consideration to the ideas it puts forth means first overcoming such prejudices. A work of satire does not carry the cachet of a work of philosophy or political economy; because exaggeration is an expected part of satire, the conventionality of the element, the fact that it can be anticipated, and classified (and then discarded as mere ‘exaggeration’) reduces its potential impact. Likewise for shock in horror or sensationalism in adventure fiction; they are made ‘safe’ for predictably appearing in a familiar structural context. To the extent that generic conventions can become formulaic, there is also the potential risk of becoming part of a closed system, a self-sustaining narrative that, ideationally, need not spill over past its literary conclusion. And because these represent exercises in acute imagination, their applicability to reality beyond the pages can be missed; they are perceived as flights of fancy rather than potential sources of instruction. For example, in *Strange Manuscript*, Melick maintains that the manuscript is “a transparent hoax,” a stunt intended to

accrue publicity for a mere “sensation novel” in the hopes of publishing and future contracts (De Mille 61). It is the text’s *generic* elements—“[i]t has the ring of a confounded sensation-monger all through”—that lead Melick to dismiss any truth value; Dr. Congreve defends the text by trying to elevate it out of the quagmire of genre, claiming the text couldn’t have been produced by any “mere sensation-monger” (De Mille 63, 65).

Genre, however, is a broad concern; I am more interested in how the texts themselves occasionally move to undermine their credibility. One recurrent narrative technique in these texts is frames and nested narratives, present in *Frankenstein*, *Pym*, *Strange Manuscript* and *The Purple Cloud*. Frames, and the presence of other narrator-characters, can both explicitly call into doubt the stories they contain (as in *Strange Manuscript*) or be presented, on the surface, as entirely faithful retellings (like *Frankenstein*); however, the delivery of stories as hearsay will always implicitly cast doubt on their accuracy, and reliable narrators are not guaranteed. Indeed, the end result of the literary ploys that will be detailed below is to call into question of authority of the narrative and/or authorial voices.

The use of frames can be compared to a *Fata Morgana* mirage, which features a complex series of refractions in which an original image is inverted repeatedly such that the image perceived can be quite distorted compared to the original object. This process of multiple inversions reminds us of the method by which De Mille creates a distorted version of contemporary European society and religion among the Kosekin, inverting hierarchies in turn so as to create a society that simultaneously inverts and upholds Victorian values (such a gender hierarchies). And like the mirage, the question persists within the story’s frame whether this is a factual representation or an illusion—a debate represented in chapter headings such as “Scientific Theories and Scepticism” (Chapter 7) or “Belief and Unbelief” (Chapter 17). By the end of the book, after repeated debates regarding the text’s veracity, the believers outnumber the sceptic three to one, but the text does not suggest whom to believe. Featherstone is defined by laziness, intellectual and physical; Dr. Congreve and Oxenden are very knowledgeable, and as such can be said to carry the imprimatur of authority, but Melick continuously

mocks and undermines their efforts as sophistry. Melick's knowledge of literature aligns him most closely with the figure of the critic, and evokes the reader's sympathy through humour. However, he is "a professional cynic, sceptic and scoffer," (De Mille 145) and the reader may readily agree that he "carr[ies] his scepticism to an absurd excess," (De Mille 70) his attempts to come up with counter-scenarios for the cylinder and the manuscript verging on the desperate. *Strange Manuscript's* frame creates uncertainty about the text, then places that doubt in an uncertain context once over; one more example of the text's thematic fondness for inversion and *mise en abîme*.⁷

Frankenstein is another text fond of layered narratives, famously constructed like a series of matryoshka dolls, stories within stories: Walton's letters to his sister contain Victor's account of his misadventures, which contain the Monster's account of his own actions up until the meeting at the glacier, and finally the Monster's account of the De Lacey family. Unlike *Strange Manuscript*, there is no doubting Thomas to call these recitations into question. Victor accepts seemingly without question the Monster's account of his existence thus far, including the murder of his brother. Walton admittedly derives "a greater conviction of the truth of [Frankenstein's] narrative" from the evidence of "the letters of Felix and Safie, which he showed me, and the apparition of the monster seen from our ship (...) than his asseverations, however earnest and connected" (Shelley 213). Victor himself "might fear to encounter your unbelief, perhaps your ridicule" when reciting his tragic biography (Shelley 31); however, he notably stakes his claim to credibility in the Arctic environment: "many things will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions" (Shelley 31). Though the Arctic portrayed in *Frankenstein* is a realist portrayal of the environment, the setting remains infused with the figurative, productive absence of knowledge that permits novelty to inhabit it. A tale told in the Arctic, despite taking place further south, acquires the Arctic's authoritativeness over the unknown and the fantastical. Ultimately, Walton finds he "cannot doubt" what he has been told

⁷ It has also been suggested that, even taking the Manuscript as 'real' within the fictional world of the novel, More's naivety and difficulties interpreting Kosekin society makes him an unreliable narrator. See Lamont-Stewart, *Essays in Canadian Irony Volume 3*, p. 10.

(Shelley 213). The reader and critic, however, are allowed more leeway, although how much is open to debate. Laurence Porter, for instance, differs with critics like Lawrence Lipking who finds the Monster's confessions spurious, in part because of their position within the narrative of Walton and Frankenstein, "both those men ... self-deluded by dreams of grandeur;" considering instead that the text takes pains to give an appearance of faithful reporting and that the nested stories "confirm each other as ... plausibly fitting the context of the main narrative" (Porter 95-96). But we need not choose between absolute belief and disbelief; there is enough uncertainty here: the possibility of transcription errors and edits amongst these various levels of recordings, the need for narrators involved to justify their actions, scepticism about the extent to which the Monster could truly understand the family, and Victor his Monster. Much like Victor pins his credibility on the Arctic setting in which the story is told⁸, the internal credibility of the nested narratives depend on the reliability of the narrator who contains it.

Pym, by contrast, places uncertainty at the fore. It begins with an odd exercise in metafiction, as 'Pym' himself gives us some details of how the work came to be written, including the involvement of one "Mr. Poe, lately editor of the Southern Literary messenger;" owing to Pym's nominal insecurities about his writing skills and worries about whether he would be believed, it was actually "Mr. Poe" who wrote and published "*under the garb of fiction*" the first few chapters of the narrative (Poe 432; original emphasis). After this "pretended fiction appeared" under Poe's name, Pym is convinced to write out the whole narrative since "the public" seemingly did not "receive it as fable" but a narrative whose "facts (...) carr[ied] with them sufficient evidence of their own authenticity" (Poe 432-433). So here we have a work of fiction that attributes truth to itself while acknowledging its prior status as fiction, and an author writing from the persona of a character whom he had previously written about in a fictional mode, but now claims partnership with outside the text. If this seems

⁸ It is possible to read the relationship between locale and belief as a metafictional commentary on genre. A story like *Frankenstein* can only be credibly told within genres that enable the suspension of disbelief, as Victor believes the Arctic does. The Gothic, the speculative, etc., are fiction's 'wild and mysterious regions'; their conventions and tropes the landmarks by which the reader recognizes that he or she has arrived there.

confusing, it is quite deliberate on Poe's part. Thompson, commenting on his edition of *Pym*, suggests this introduction serves "the dual purpose of perpetrating a tongue-in-cheek hoax while giving greater verisimilitude to the narrative;" yet these "logical games" by which "the previous pretense to fiction 'confirms' its truth" is part of the "contradictory circularity of the argument [that] is deliberately absurd," one of many "ironic observations about the craft of writing found in the text" (Poe 433n2). The heavy-handed protests of the text's truth, the specific mention of its prior status as fiction, and the Pym character's inclination towards duplicity about the text, allow the attentive reader to doubt about the credibility of the narrative even within the text itself. As if this introduction wasn't enough, the book also ends with a metafictional *Note*, written by Poe in the persona of an anonymous editor, explaining that Pym suddenly died. "Mr. Poe" is once again brought up, this time refusing to continue writing where Pym left off, owing, in part, to "his disbelief in the entire truth of the latter portions of the narration" (Poe 561). The *Note*-writer goes on to criticize Pym for his reliability, as he misses what the *Note*-writer feels is obvious lettering in the shape of the chasms, and further objects that "the facts in question have, beyond doubt, escaped the attention of Mr. Poe" as well (Poe 562). Yet we recall that Nelson proves the *Note*-writer himself to be unreliable when he erroneously claims that "[n]othing *white* was to be found at Tsalal" (Poe 563, original emphasis), showing the *Note*-writer to be either an inattentive reader or blinded by his desire to impose a Manichean schema of colour on a more ambiguous text (Nelson 102-103). Between the poor observations and potential duplicity of Pym, the dubious and inattentive 'Poe,' and the erroneous, ideological *Note*-writer, *Pym*'s frames provided us with three potential narrator-writer-critic figures, none of whom we are encouraged to trust fully (Kennedy 78). The main narrative, suspended between the observations and justifications, is placed in a matrix of uncertainty where fiction and reality are served by the same content, authorship is destabilized⁹, and the narrator's interpretation is brought into question by interior commentators.

⁹ Pym claims that it is obvious "where [Poe's] portions ends and my own commences; the

The Purple Cloud requires that the reader pass through several layers of reported narration before arriving at the main story. We meet “the writer” in the first line of text, possibly but not necessarily Shiel, but he is not the author of the story (Shiel xiii). It has come to him via one Dr. Arthur Lister Browne, who is dying and currently under the influence of morphia as he writes a letter here transcribed; but *he* is not the author. The letter mentions one Mary Wilson, a patient of Dr. Browne’s, herself now dead, and who existed in a state of constant near-death when Dr. Browne knew her: “she so suggested what we call ‘the other world’, some odour of the worm, more ghost than woman!” (Shiel xiv; original emphasis) This woman, when placed in a trance-state through hypnosis, would recite (mumble, really) texts which she would, hovering as some sort of astral projection, read over the shoulders of contemporaries in the past and future. But *she* is not the author: “us read, another writes,” she says (Shiel xvii). Who is the author? Finally, it is Adam Jeffson, the narrator of the main narrative; the journal/diary he has been writing over the decades of the novel’s actions is the text that Mary Wilson read and repeated, Dr. Browne recorded and ‘the writer’ restored to narrative form. Adam Jeffson is himself a rather unreliable narrator; by his own admission, he spends much of the timeframe sunk in madness, performed in writing by a sometimes fractured mode of storytelling and paranoid/megalomaniacal religious delusions¹⁰. But even setting that aside, the convoluted method by which the reader is put into contact with the narrative requires a kind of serial suspension of disbelief, with each layer of the frame introducing a new form of uncertainty, replete with death, drugs and dementia. The introductory frame is replete with pseudo-science (with the caveat that not all of Shiel’s contemporaries would have considered it so [Morgan 275]) that seeks to ground the bizarre method of observation and transcription in studious research: Dr. Browne has worked with this particular subject “[f]or fifteen years,” and readily claims that “the reporting powers of the mind in the trance-state” is “a fact which

difference in point of style will be readily perceived” (Poe 433). However, as Thompson points out, and any reader can attest to, “there is no readily perceived difference of style after” Poe’s contribution supposedly ends and Pym’s begins (Poe 433n2).

¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of how Jeffson’s madness impacts the form and credibility of the text, see Morgan 268-274.

Psychical Research only after endless investigation admits to be scientific” (Shiel xv-xvi). Dr. Browne does not help his case with melodramatic language that draws on a gothic lexicon, comparing his method of healing through “hypnotic trance” to an exorcism (“with a few suggestions I could expel her Legion”), or calling on the authority of “every old crone in the Middle Ages” (Shiel xiv-xv). Like the main story, the frame admixes tropes of science-fiction and fantasy, drawing on fantastical concepts (astral projection, divine punishment) but using science to contextualize them (‘Psychical Research’, volcanic eruption) (Morgan 275). The presence of these two distinct and not always compatible generic ‘languages’ of justification makes the text less, not more, certain; the reader is asked to accept the in-text reality of not one but a multiplicity of phenomenon outside their experience, with different causation. Far from increasing verisimilitude, the text looks increasingly fabulist the further out one progresses in the frame.

REWRITING AND OMISSION

The Purple Cloud’s layers of interpreters also remind us of the uncertainty that comes with acts of literary re-writing. When Mary Wilson would ‘read’ texts in her trance state, “[s]he would emit a stream of sounds—I can hardly call it *speech*—murmurous, guttural” exhalations (Shiel xv; original emphasis). Dr. Browne, though he claims that “in the course of years my ear learned to discern the words,” nonetheless qualifies the process’ reliability: he speaks of “her more connected utterances” (implying that her trance-speech is sometimes disconnected), and his ability to “follow *somewhat*” what Wilson murmurs (Shiel xv, xvii; emphasis mine). These utterances Dr. Browne writes down in shorthand—“scribbled in pencil, and without vowels,” a style of writing marked by deliberate textural omissions¹¹ (Shiel xiii). The stories in his notebooks are available to his writer friend only “if [he] can contrive to decipher” these texts, turning the process of turning the notes to a novel into a kind of cryptographic

¹¹ Shorthand also features in the seminal Gothic novel of the period, “*Dracula*”, and its literary implications have occasionally come under the consideration of critics. See, for one example, Wicke, “Vampiric Typewriting” 175-176.

challenge, and indeed ‘the writer’ confirms that “deciphering [the notebooks] has been no holiday” (Shiel xiii-xiv). The “giddy shapes” of the lettering form an “*ensemble* [that] resembles startled swarms hovering on the wing,” comparing the text to something alive, motile, difficult to pin down (Shiel xiii; original emphasis). ‘The writer’ also admits to limited interventions in the text, “the title, division into paragraphs, &c., have been arbitrarily contrived by myself for convenience” (Shiel xvii). A reader can be forgiven for wondering just how accurate a transcription of the ‘original’ text, the unwritten journal of the eventual last man, we hold in our hands, considering the process of broken, semi-audible recitation, codified compression and deciphering, then deflation and novelization we have to go through in order to arrive at the text.

Rewriting is present, to varying degrees, in all the major texts this project has considered; in no small part, this is due to a common concern with situating the source and materiality of the text, within or without the fictional framework of the story. *The Purple Cloud*, as we have seen, is strongly concerned with providing the origin and method by which the text is made available to the reader. *Frankenstein* provides an epistolary frame to give a reason for the existence of the text—Walton’s letters to his sister—and to give an appropriate context for how each nested narrative is passed along a string of narrators to reach Walton in the first place. *Symzonia* ends with the author directly addressing the readership, explaining why he was forced to write the book they now hold. Pym, as mentioned, addresses himself to the readership in the introduction of the book, justifying his reasons for writing out his narrative (the exhortation of others, as per Pym’s tendency to sublimated vanity). *Strange Manuscript* contains extensive discussions on the truth and materiality of the main text in the frames, and includes an introductory note from Adam More explaining his reason for writing the Manuscript: “so that [my father] may learn the fate of his son” (De Mille 8). However, it should be mentioned, reader access to the frame chapters is unaccounted for; they are simply presented in the traditional, third-person novelistic fashion. Likewise, *The Frozen Deep* is presented as is, with no source for the tale mentioned—but, as will be discussed later, *The Frozen Deep*’s very

existence is a massive exercise in rewriting. This recurrent concern with the source of the text most likely relates to genre; as Thompson mentioned in regards to *Pym*, the introduction seeks to grant “greater verisimilitude to the narrative” (Poe 433n2) by accounting for its origins. It is no coincidence that the most realist text, *The Frozen Deep*, and the frame of *Strange Manuscript* (itself realist if one opts to treat the inner text as a hoax, as Melick believes), are the ones not compelled to account for their existence.

Even as these tactics may better situate the text vis-à-vis the reader’s locale, they also introduce uncertainty within the text. *The Purple Cloud*, in addition to the troubling layers of transcription, makes evident one of the problems with the kind of retrospective rewriting these texts feature: memory. The story opens with the narrator struggling to remember the name of a preacher who seemed to prophesize the dire consequences of his Arctic journey; by the end of the text, written over a decade after the first journal entries, he has forgotten the name again. Jeffson’s admitted uncertainty about his recollections (not aided by his periods of madness) seems like an honest portrayal of what retrospective writing would entail¹². By contrast, the reader is expected to believe that Pym can recall specific details (some quite technical), conversations, sentiments, etc., ten years after his adventure begins (not to mention earlier, childhood episodes); his narrative is a memoir, and carries all the pitfalls the genre entails. Pym himself troubles the process: “having kept no journal during a greater portion of the time ... I feared I should not be able to write from mere memory” a narrative with “the *appearance* of that truth it would really possess” (Poe 432; original emphasis). And what he does write, he confesses, may be prone to “the natural and unavoidable exaggeration” that occurs “when detailing events which have had powerful influence in exciting the imaginative faculties” (432). The same should hold true, albeit in a shorter timeframe, of Adam Seaborn, whereas we have no idea how much time elapsed between Adam More’s experiences and when he wrote the text, although the better part of a year goes by within the story itself. The Monster must editorialize during his account of his origins since, at the time

¹² For more on memory and retrospect in *Purple Cloud*, see Morgan 275-276.

he experienced these events, he didn't have the linguistic or conceptual apparatuses to articulate what was happening, but otherwise seem to recall the events after his 'birth' with remarkable clarity.¹³ Porter points out that, for all intents and purposes, we are meant to see the Monster's account in *Frankenstein* as "reported (verbatim) by two others," stories "they can remember without omission" and are not "fabulating to their own advantage" (95). Yet the Monster's volume-long account is quite the lengthy speech for Victor to memorize; and Victor's own recitation is written out by Walton after the fact: "I have resolved every night (...) to record, as nearly as possible in his own words, what [Victor] has related during the day" or "at least make notes" if his evenings are otherwise occupied (Shelley 31). This quick notation—tucked away, almost hidden—suddenly foregrounds the fact that this lengthy narrative is itself the product of multiple, potentially unreliable varieties of 'recording.'¹⁴

The argument over whether Victor, or even Walton, would amend the Monster's narrative to suit their own purposes also highlights problems of motivation that can arise during retrospective writing. As discussed, the frame readers of *Strange Manuscript* debate amongst themselves as to whether they should accept the author's stated reasons for writing the text (and thus the reality of what is claimed), or attribute other motivations to the author. Readers of *The Purple Cloud* can legitimately ask whether Jeffson's account of spiritual warfare within and over his being is true, a result of his madness, or an attempt to deflect blame onto external forces. At the end of *Symzonia*, Seaborn admits that his chief motivation in writing the book is financial, subsequent to the loss of all profits from his voyage, with a plea for funds that would allow him to escape his "present uncomfortable situation on the *Liberties* [bankruptcy protection]," pay back his debts and avoid prison time (Seaborn 248; original italics). Without any evidence

¹³ We can, perhaps, ascribe his memory of phenomena he could not then name or define as one with is his other remarkable displays of mental acuity, such as the speed at which he learns language. It has been suggested that "his extraordinary faculties" are not unlike those found "in so-called idiot savants and certain autistic persons," with the Monster's particular origin an equivalent neurological basis (Porter 94).

¹⁴ Though it should also be mentioned that Victor, discovering that Walton is writing down his story, "himself augmented and corrected" the notes, particularly as relates to his conversation with the Monster (Shelley 213).

for his narrative, and most other witnesses incommunicado, there is nothing to prevent Seaborn from embellishing his story, and significant incentive to do so! Pym, for his part, claims recounting his story as “a duty,” though his constant self-deprecation seems intended to trigger a “conviction to the contrary” from his public, and speaks to a sense of vain-glory about the man (also notable in his dismissal of Peters as a witness, despite the fact that Pym, per his account, owes Peters his life several times over) (Poe: 432-433). Pym also hints, but never elaborates on, “several reasons ... of a nature altogether private” for an initial reluctance to write out his tale; we are never made privy to these motivations, if indeed any exist (Poe: 432).

Pym’s refusal to divulge his motives is an example of omission, which often dovetails with rewriting, since omission is a retrospective choice. Such absences in the story—if they can be detected—highlight unknown or missing data, and increase uncertainty. Victor, for one, outright refuses to disclose “the particulars of his creature’s formation”—understandable, given the context, but nonetheless indicating deliberate gaps in the story (Shelley 213). Omission can also be a function of the story rather than characters; *Symzonia*, as mentioned, gradually denudes the narrative of any evidence that would have proven the veracity of Seaborn’s claim. This is a very deliberate process foregrounded by the narrative: first Seaborn swears his men to secrecy about their voyage to Symzonia, with the result that any later claim regarding the inner world is contradicted by a pre-existing account. Then his “Symzonian manuscripts” (Seaborn 226), the sole goods he was allowed to take away from that land, vanish from his cabin, owing either to the actions of a disgruntled officer, Mr. Slim—the only one to have refused the oath to secrecy—or a monkey one of the mates had brought aboard. The *Explorer* then runs into a hurricane whose purpose in the text is to cause “the boxes containing the large bones, and my botanical, geological, mineralogical, zoological, ornithological, ichthyological [sic], conchological, and entomological specimens”—all stored in the same space, naturally—to be lost at sea when the hull ruptures, the material evidence following the literary evidence into oblivion (Seaborn 224). The same storm produces a single casualty, Mr.

Slim; the juxtaposed loss of the evidence and the one individual eager to talk about their discovery highlights—if the reader had not yet noticed—the narrative stripping of proof. Finally, Seaborn’s first mate—who by his officer status might have provided the credible backing to his captain’s story that mere sailors could not—takes off on another trip at the helm of the *Explorer*, and suffers a shipwreck that leaves him similarly ruined. This string of coincidences, all to the same goal of preventing Seaborn’s claims from being verified, arouses the reader’s scepticism. Given the text’s satirical slant, the misadventures and confessions at the end of the narrative seem a way to invite the reader to share in the joke of a hoax, and casts doubt—from within the narrative—on everything that has preceded.

Probably the most notable form of omission is absence of the text itself—*Pym* and *Strange Manuscript* are presented as incomplete stories, whose endings do not represent the actual conclusion of the story or even the text. *Pym* ends with the vision of the great white figure, with Pym and Peters adrift in the oceans of the southern pole. As both survived to return to the United States, we know that this is not *their* end; indeed, as the story covers only a year of a nearly decade-long absence, the narrative as it stands may be only a fraction of Pym’s actual adventures. However, Pym has since died; the *Note*-writer declines to mention how this occurred in another omission, claiming that “[t]he circumstances ... [of] the late sudden and distressing death of Mr. Pym are already well known to the public through the medium of the daily press;” (Poe 561) another pretence at Pym’s existence, but one which—as the reader has obviously *not* learned of any such incident—seems to undermine the presumed hoax, highlighting Pym’s fictional status. Like the vanished Symzonian manuscripts, “the few remaining chapters which were to have completed his narrative ... have been irrecoverably lost through the accident by which he perished himself;” (Poe 561) it is not sufficient for the knowledge of the end of the story to have died with Pym, but the physicality of the remaining portions of the narrative must be destroyed as well. Though the point at which the tale ends is thematically resonant, the reader is thus denied an ending to the plot (satisfactory and otherwise), and any further

unfurling of what was becoming (as ‘Mr. Poe’s’ scepticism points to) an increasingly fantastical tale, such that the reader has little to go on to justify belief or disbelief. Surely nothing increases uncertainty like the absence of the story’s purported ending! We find a similar phenomenon in *Strange Manuscript*, though the reason for the incomplete story is far more pedestrian: “Here Featherstone stopped, yawned, and laid down the manuscript. ‘That’s enough for to-day,’ said he; ‘I’m tired, and can’t read anymore. It’s time for supper’” (De Mille 269). The similarities of these abrupt endings has not gone unnoticed by critics, and the reason why it abruptly cuts off has been investigated¹⁵; for our purposes, it is sufficient to note that a great deal of story must be omitted as the ‘ending’ we do get is rather positive—More and Almah reunited and now in charge of Kosekin society—whereas More begins his manuscript with a despondent tone, representing the sheltered Antarctic continent as “a land from which escape is as impossible as from the grave” (De Mille 8). The apparent stability of the ending is called into question, while, thanks to Featherstone’s lethargy, the continued histories of the characters are denied to the reader.

The Frozen Deep does not, on first glance, contain this sort of uncertainty: the story is presented in a straight-forward fashion, and the ending is quite closed-off, with the characters in pairs as loved ones are reunited (the lone character who has no such counterpart dies). Yet, read within the context in which it was produced, *The Frozen Deep* is an extended exercise in rewriting and deliberate omission. What is being rewritten is the Franklin expedition, and particularly Scott Rae’s account of its fate; what is being omitted is cannibalism. The genesis of *The Frozen Deep* lies in Dickens’ engaged defence of the reputation of the Franklin expedition, publishing several articles in *Household Words* to that purpose.¹⁶ Hill points out that after extensive debate in the periodicals, “writing ... and acting in *The Frozen Deep* also provided Charles Dickens with a way to answer once again Rae’s assertions” (130), a process that involved not just

¹⁵ See Kilgour, “Cannibals and Critics,” for a comparison of *Pym* and *Strange Manuscript*; see LaBossier, Milnes for extended discussions of the book’s ending.

¹⁶ See Brannan 12-21 and Hill 115-29 for extended discussions of Dickens’ fixation with, and debate with Rae over, the Franklin expedition.

rewriting Wilkie Collins' draft versions of the play, but rewriting the history of English arctic exploration. The disposition of the stranded British sailors where "the men practice an orderly naval discipline" despite the extremity of their situation is meant to affirm the stability of the English character, reliable in all circumstances, "a *tableau vivant* of his position against Rae" who had maintained that no one safe at home could understand what stranded Arctic sailors might resort to (Hill 133). Dickens not only feels that he *can* understand (because he believes he understands their *Englishness*), he can *perform* it as well, substituting his characters for the actual explorers, his body onstage for those lost on the ice¹⁷. Rather churlishly, Dickens' revision of the Arctic journey includes a hysterical, Scottish nurse who (ultimately, incorrectly) prophesizes the doom of the explorers, which can be seen as a jab at Scotsman Rae (Hill 133), significantly recasting him in this version of events.

The aim of Dickens' rewriting is to erase the threat of cannibalism. As mentioned, "there are no overt mentions of cannibalism in the text" (130)—complete omission—but that very absence is a palpable presence given the context of Rae's report and the ensuing debate. Dickens' desire to 'paper over' (an appropriate expression) cannibalism, and any uncertainty it raises about the English character, even extends to portraying himself "the role of Richard Wardour, the play's potential cannibal," and in so doing *enact* the steadfastness of British character he claimed made cannibalism amongst Englishmen an impossibility (Hill 130)¹⁸. One of the ways in omission occurs through redirecting the source of the play's danger: instead of men driven to extremes of behaviour by physical causes, by the need for survival, they bear sickness and death with due dignity; rather, it is love—and Wardour's jealousy for the man now affianced to his beloved—that lends *The Frozen Deep* its crux. Hill finds the implications of

¹⁷ By "analogy" rather than literally, however: Dickens' writings revealed far too great a respect for those explorers—*The Frozen Deep* itself a defence of their reputation—to want to actually displace the 'true' heroes (Brannan 16).

¹⁸ Cannibal sublimations in the text are at times so obvious that one can barely call it sublimated at all. The expedition's cook makes bone soup for the men using kettles—kettles, which were at the heart of Dickens' debate with Rae, as the latter insisted they had been used to cook human remains—thus providing a 'safe' explanation for even these ominous artefacts (Hill 118, 121, 137).

cannibalism in Wardour's departure with Aldersley at the end of the second act "unspoken—not because it is unspeakable, but because it is understood," (137) that is, implicitly by the audience, and feeds the play's melodrama and suspense. The play, then, hangs upon the audience's uncertainty about the outcome, and by extension the potential fallibility of English character. This prospect is reinforced when Wardour finally reappears sickly and suffering from "the loss of reason on which Dickens both blamed 'white' cannibalism and identified as a side effect of cannibalism" (Hill 137). But then, of course, it turns out that Aldersley is alive and well thanks to Wardour's dedication, overturning expectations by making the potential murderer and cannibal into a saviour figure. The shift in roles is so extreme that, in retrospect, it seems bizarre to have even considered such barbaric behaviour from such a stalwart man, strange to have ever been uncertain of the outcome. Dickens rewrites Rae from broad themes to the minutiae of his report, all to the aim of refuting what is never mentioned; in so doing, he cannot help but bring the audience to confront their own doubts, but designs the play in such a fashion as to then dispel insecurities about the English temperament.

CONCLUSION: "WHERE THERE IS DOUBT..."

In examining the Arctic and Antarctic fiction of English-language writers, it may seem as though we are, ourselves, caught amongst the multiple reflections of the *Fata Morgana*; a matrix of the unknown and uncertain where solid footing is difficult to locate. The stories here examined take us to blank spaces on the map, regions they had little or no information about, the cartographic unknown; the adventures of the white male explorer-protagonist in these settings, themselves of varying credibility, work (deliberately or otherwise) to undermine received ideas about the stability of received notions of gender and race, among them the inherent superiority of the white male; and yet these interrogations are in turn placed into a context of uncertainty as the narrative itself introduces doubts about its own reality. Some might find this lack of concreteness frustrating, perhaps even bordering on solipsism, but it is my hope that this paper has

reaffirmed that the unknown has productive value, and doubt can be usefully deployed to serve a number of functions within and without the text.

An unsourced Latin proverb says '*Ubi dubium ibi libertas*'; 'Where there is doubt, there is freedom.' For those who interested themselves in the literature of the unknown, in the yet-to-be-discovered boundaries of knowledge about the human condition, the trope of the undiscovered land has often provided that freedom by presenting the ideal setting for ideational exploration through fiction; from the fabulous lands that populated the periphery of the conceptual world created by ancient myths, to the newfound planets of modern science-fiction. In the nineteenth century, as the oceans were increasingly charted, there seemed to be ever fewer of the undiscovered islands Europeans had favoured for their speculative literature in centuries past: discovery shrinks the domain of doubt. In that context, the still unexplored regions at the poles become the next stage in this tradition, settings still sufficiently rich in the unknown that they could be used as the basis for imaginative constructions ranging from primeval jungle to advanced utopias.

With that as a basis, several literary manoeuvres become possible. The extremity of the environment—distance, climate, etc.—can be turned like a darkling mirror onto those who have journeyed there, setting excess against excess, to highlight the limits of the rigid racial and gender ideologies western explorers carry with them into these places. In such a manner does the extreme masculinity of the North Pole, as conceived, or the excessive whiteness of the Symzonians wind up displacing the explorers from their positions at the top of their own hierarchies. In confronting this similar-but-greater setting and/or people, the white male explorer is forced to experience the world from the position of a marginalized other, emasculated or racialized. The physical and narrative perils attendant to the protagonist due to these excesses are a reflection of the ideological perils in allowing categories of race or gender to overmaster the world—to dominate even unto the farthest reaches of the Earth. Racial absolutism is the domain of villains and ultimately lethal in *Pym*, while Seaborn knows that the fate of western civilization, should the Symzonians learn the truth, would be

the very slavery it has inflicted on others; in *Frankenstein*, the attempt to masculinise reproduction, to render women obsolete, triggers an existential racial threat, and that cataclysmic scenario is made manifest in *The Purple Cloud* when the last man on Earth finds that his masculinity and westernness collapse without an Other to provide contrasting self-definition. Being carried to geographical extremes becomes analogous with carrying ideas to their extremes, and the consequences are typically negative.

That is the comparison. The Arctic environment can also serve as a contrast. If the north is masculine, the southern pole and continent becomes rather thoroughly feminized; yet the explorers who encounter the environment-writ-female find, against expectations, that they are dwarfed by the setting's intrinsic power, incapable of escaping its vortices, chasms, channels, and rocky wombs. Once again, the insufficiency—gendered, racial—of the explorer is highlighted, only instead of being reduced in status by the manifestation of a greater version of themselves, they are now found wanting before their opposites; Pym finds that the blackest men ever encountered still do not consider him white, while Adam More is made captive to inverted hierarchies that see darkness valued over light, and women in nominal authority over men. Porden's knights must be rescued by their damsels, and Ballantyne's jovial Inuit—the Arctic 'native' elsewhere derided by the likes of Dickens—outstrips the European explorers both in size and skill. If comparison highlights the problems of too rigid an ideology, contrast allows authors to use the unknown Ant/Arctic setting to construct, or at least suggest, alternative ways a society can contrast itself. A doubtful environment permits doubt about institutions and ideologies to be made manifest.

Of course, such speculations are not granted free reins. Quite often, after the alternative has been presented, it is rendered in a negative fashion—and in so doing, reinforces and stabilizes the self-conceptions of western society. Just as Adam Jeffson regains his status as white male in meeting an Oriental woman, audiences can be displaced into these stories of difference merely to reaffirm the known and familiar. By presenting these scenarios in the context of genres known for shock value and wild imagination, they are simultaneously contained by the

same generic conventions that enable them. And doubt is a double-edged sword. Just as the uncertain setting allows speculation, the tendency for these stories to account for themselves, and play with their own fictitiousness, creates uncertainty about the reality of what has been presented even within the confines of the narrative itself. Multiple, sometimes unreliable, author-narrator figures, who rewrite, omit, and otherwise toy with the text—with the audience sometimes complicit in these games—become a way of doubting their own doubts; a means by which one can point at the text and claim that it never *truly* advanced anything so radical as to question the primacy of the white male explorer.

And yet doubt, once raised, is difficult to dispel; this is one case where fighting fire with fire is only marginally successful in quelling burning interrogation. *The Frozen Deep* exemplifies this; in its strenuous efforts to reinforce certainty about the character of the white (British) male explorer, it delineates more strongly than ever the thrall such insecurities held over western society, creator and public alike, by its very refusal to engage with them overtly. And the *mise en abyme* of doubt (by doubting itself) seems not just structurally apt, given the fondness of many of these texts for using metafictional devices like frames to engage their interests from within and without the text; it is also thematically apt. Doubt, the intermediary of belief and disbelief, is the in-between position par excellence, a state of being suspended between two (or more) absolute options; for a body of literature concern with showcasing the perils of ideas carried to their extreme, doubt is an appropriate champion. It is the central and wonderful irony of these stories that the use of poles—the literal, geographic poles, and the thematic polarities of race and gender—serves to undermine faith in such binaries, and instead celebrates the productive value of difference and the interstitial (blank) spaces between certainties in which artists best perform their craft.

WORKS CITED

PRIMARY SOURCES

- Ballantyne, R.M. *The Giant of the North or Pokings Around the Pole*. London: James Nisbet & Co., 1882.
- De Mille, James. *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*. Malcolm Parks, ed. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006.
- Collins, Wilkie & Charles Dickens. *The Frozen Deep: A Drama in Three Acts*, appearing in *Under the Management of Mr. Charles Dickens*, Robert Louis Brannan, ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966. P. 91-160.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, appearing in *The Selected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe*, G.R. Thompson ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004. P. 432-563.
- Porden, Eleanor Anne. *The Veils; or the Triumph of Constancy*. London: 1815.
- Seaborn, Adam. *Symzonia; A Voyage of Discovery*. New York: 1820.
- Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*. Maurice Hindle, ed. London: Penguin Books, 1992.
- Shiel, M.P. *The Purple Cloud*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Aldiss, Brian with David Wingrove. *Trillion Year Spree: The History of Science Fiction*. New York: Atheneum, 1986.
- Ashcroft, Bill & Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Billings, Harold. *M. P. Shiel: a Biography of his Early Years*. Austin: Roger Beacham, 2005.
- Bleiler, Everett F. *Science-Fiction, the Early Years*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1990.
- Bloom, Lisa. *Gender on Ice: American Ideologies of Polar Expeditions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

- Brannan, Robert Louis. *Under the Management of Mr. Charles Dickens*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966.
- Dameron, J. Lasley. "Pym's Polar Episode: Conclusion or Beginning?" in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, Richard Kopley ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Dobson, Theresa & Rebecca Luce-Kapler. "Stitching Texts: Gender and Geography in *Frankenstein* and *Patchwork Girl*." *Changing English* 12, no. 2, 2005. Pages 266-277.
- Edwards, Justin D. *Gothic Canada: Reading the Spectre of a National Literature*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005.
- Gilmer, Sander L. *Franz Kafka, the Jewish Patient*. New York : Routledge, 1995.
- Halberstam, Judith. *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.
- Harvey, Ronald C. *The Critical History of Edgar Allan Poe's The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym: "A Dialogue with Unreason"*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1998.
- Hill, Jen. *White Horizon: The Arctic in the Nineteenth-Century British Imagination*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008.
- Hince, Bernadette. *The Antarctic Dictionary: A Complete Guide to Antarctic English*. Collingwood: CSIRO Publishing, 2000.
- Hirsch, David H. "'Postmodern' or Post-Auschwitz: The Case of Poe" in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, Richard Kopley ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Kennedy, J. Gerald. *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym and the Abyss of Interpretation*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995.
- Ketterer, David. *Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- . "Tracing Shadows: Pym Criticism, 1980-1990" in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, Richard Kopley ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Kilgour, Maggie. "Cannibals and Critics: An Exploration of James De Mille's *Strange Manuscript*." *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* Vol. 30, Issue 1, 1997. Pages 19-38.

- La Bossiere, Camille R. "The Mysterious End of James De Mille's Unfinished *Strange Manuscript*." *Essays on Canadian Writing* Issue 27, 1983/84. Pages 41-55.
- Lamont-Stewart, Linda. "Misreading De Mille's *Strange Ms.*: Irony and Misdirection." *Essays in Canadian Irony*, vol. 3, 1988.
- . "Rescued by Postmodernism: The Escalating Value of James De Mille's *Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*" *Canadian Literature* No. 145, 1995. Pages 21-36.
- Lew, Joseph W. "The Deceptive Other: Mary Shelley's Critique of Orientalism." *Studies in Romanticism* 30:2, 1991. Pages 255-283.
- McKusick, James C. "Ecology" in *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*, Nicholas Roe ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pages 199-218.
- Milnes, Stephen. "Colonialist Discourse, Lord Featherstone's Yawn and the Significance of the Denouement in *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*." *Canadian Literature* No. 145, 1995. Pages 86-104.
- Morgan, Monique. "Madness, Unreliable Narration, and Genre in *Purple Cloud*." *Science Fiction Studies* 36, Part 2, 2009. Pages 266-283.
- Morin, Karen M. "Charles P. Daly's Gendered Geography, 1860-1890." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 98:4, 2008. Pages 897-919.
- Munich, Adrienne. *Queen Victoria's Secrets*. Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Nayder, Lillian. *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Nelson, Dana D. *The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature 1638-1867*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Pollin, Burton. "Poe's Life Reflected through the Sources of *Pym*" in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, Richard Kopley ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Porter, Laurence. *Women's vision in Western culture: the empathic community*. Westport: Praeger, 2005.
- Rieder, John. *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008.

- Rowe, John Carlos. "Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism" in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, Richard Kopley ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Seed, David. *Anticipations: Essays on Early Science Fiction and its Precursors*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995.
- Schoene-Harwood, Berthold. *Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from Frankenstein to the New Man*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.
- . *Mary Shelley: Frankenstein*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Simpson-Housley, Paul. *Antarctica: Exploration, Perception and Metaphor*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- Smith, Johanna M., ed. *Frankenstein* (Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism). Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000.
- Stableford, Brian. *Jaunting on the Scoriac Tempests and Other Essays on Fantastic Literature*. Wildside Press, 2009.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures" in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Ann McClintock, Aarmir Mufti and Ella Shohat, eds. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Pages 344-69.
- Stommel, Henry. *Lost Islands: The Story of Islands that have Vanished from Nautical Charts*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984.
- Thompson, G.R. "The Arabesque Design of *Arthur Gordon Pym*" in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, Richard Kopley ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Wicke, Jennifer. "Vampiric Typewriting: *Dracula* and its Media" in *The Horror Reader*, Ken Gelder ed. London: Routledge, 2000. Pages 172-183.
- Weiner, Bruce I. "Novels, Tales, and Problems of Form in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*" in *Poe's Pym: Critical Explorations*, Richard Kopley ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Wilson, Eric G. *The Spiritual History of Ice: Romanticism, Science and the Imagination*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003.