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## Horror and the Posthuman: Edgar Allan Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, Nonhumans, and Ethics

Of all the images that make our world, animal images are particularly buried inside us. We feel the pull of them before we know to name them, or how to even fully see them. It is as if they are always waiting, crude sketches of themselves, in the recesses of our bodies. As if every animal a human brain has ever seen, it has swallowed.... And perhaps the red-haired mammoth, which someone in the cave named Yuka, takes the onlookers further back still, to memories buried not in the brain, but in marrow and fiber and peptide. Far into the flesh, where the temporal world starts to wobble a bit.

— Elena Passarello, *Animals Strike Curious Poses*, 15.

Edgar Allan Poe's only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, is surprisingly full of nonhuman animals: a Newfoundland dog, barnacles, sharks, penguins, albatross, sea slugs, and birds and sea-beasts unknown and unnameable. Equally surprising is how few readings of *Pym* take note of these nonhumans as such, that is, as subjects of study or subjects of the narrative.<sup>1</sup> Critical animal studies, as it has developed over the past forty or so years, has increasingly focused attention on this type of oversight in the sciences and particularly the humanities, positing that the history of Western thought about "the animal," broadly speaking since the Renaissance and certainly since the Enlightenment era and the humanism subtending it, contributed to the construction of "the human" as that which is not-animal, codifying the notion that "the animal" — notably considered in this totalizing fashion — is pure body, René Descartes's *bête-machine*, while the human is the animal that has overcome "his" animality, the human residing properly in the mind. As such, the animal has continued to be universalized, the human considered the subject of narrative, indeed seen as the only animal with the right to subjectivity in this view, and thus the only being capable of exercising ethical behavior. I want to offer a reading of *Pym* alongside a reading of critical animal studies that, as recent theorists have proposed, considers nonhumans as capable of not only being the object of ethical practice but also as the *subject*, as beings that initiate ethical encounters, thereby inhabiting and co-creating a moral world. Appearing in 1838, *Pym* is the product of an era in Western history that is commonly generalized as post-Enlightenment in the sense that Enlightenment humanist values of rationality, objectivity, and individual human autonomy had hardened into ideology, positioning the nonhuman as unworthy of human attention, indeed as the defining other of the human. This long era might best be called modernity in the sense that Ron

Broglie reads Bruno Latour's definition: modernity "is predicated on the necessary fiction of separating nature as the realm of the nonhuman from culture ... 'the realm of the human'" ("Introduction" 2). My reading of this novel aims to complicate that generalization: Poe, I will offer, demonstrates in *Pym* an uncannily posthuman ethical position: human-nonhuman interaction in *Pym*, in several instances, produces an ethics initiated by animals and responded to by humans. This is not an ethics seen in several recent animal liberation and animal rights thinkers — one that, with good reasons, trains our attention on the human animal's obligations to the nonhuman — but rather an ethics that more fundamentally shifts the very character of both human and nonhuman. The novel does not simply reverse the order of the ethical gaze but instead complicates both what is considered human and what is considered animal.

Poe is notorious for his gothic stories, and *Pym* is no exception. To some degree, it is the gothic extremes of this novel that produce its horror-effect: as Pym narrates in something of a premonition of what will befall him on his sea-journey, his story involves "shipwreck and famine, death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown" (57), not to mention rotting corpses, near-constant drunkenness, cannibalism, and the constant, gnawing hunger he and his companions experience. I would add that the horror-effect is also brought about by the narrative strangeness of the novel, another type of extreme not only thematized in the story but also performed in the unsettling narrative lacunae and shifts in style. These gothic extremes, in *Pym*, are in most if not all cases accompanied by animals; the animals here, I argue, produce an ethical point of view which creates, for both the title character *and* the reader, the nauseating unsettling of "the human" that accompanies horror. Encounters with nonhumans in *Pym* produce such an effect, the specific ethics-effect varying with each animal or species. In what follows, I explore some of those encounters and effects to account for the revulsion the book has produced in readers since its first publication. *Pym's* posthuman position does not, of course, adhere to a historical chronology of "post-ness," but rather, as James Berkley writes of cybernetic posthumanism in Poe's short stories about human-machine amalgams, it is a posthumanism that "is not simply a matter of temporal or historical succession, the passage from one 'epoch' of subjectivity to another, but also a matter of spatiotemporal relations between subjects and environments that get played out simultaneously in narrative and phenomenological form" (357). Indeed, the discomfort produced by *Pym* could be said to arise from the unsettling of the human as center of the moral universe, literally disorienting the liberal humanist subject in thematic and narrative terms.

**Nonhuman Ethics Now.** It is crucial at this moment in animal studies to move away from the humanist, universalizing view of “the animal” and to develop ways of studying animals in their plurality and distinctiveness. In earlier years of the now-maturing interdisciplinary field, writers like Peter Singer and Tom Regan, though they approached animals from utilitarian and rights-based premises, respectively, similarly constructed “the animal” as a single category. And for good reason: to establish respectability for the study of animals in the first place it was necessary to make a case for similarities between animals and humans so as to protect animal rights on human-centered (already accepted) grounds. Such a discourse paints other species with a broad brush in an attempt to overcome hundreds of years of the Cartesian understanding of animals as simply and only different, other. Developing alongside this so-called identity argument, other, mostly Continental thinkers proffered what might be seen as the opposite view: animals in this analysis *are* distinctly different from humans. This school of thought insists on a firm — what Jacques Derrida would term “abyssal” — boundary between humans and other animals to put nonhuman animality on the map as specifically not-human in order to begin to deconstruct the binaries definitive of liberal humanist thinking by exposing the constructedness of those binaries (“The Animal” 381). Both lines of thinking, however, have tended to continue the universalizing concept of “the animal,” overlooking the diversity of species, not to mention individual animals. The flaw in this kind of categorization is that it reproduces the humanist error of making the human the measure of all other species; whether other species were seen to either share characteristics in common with humans — language, rationality, sociality, for example — or not, the presence or absence of human traits defined the arguments. A truly posthuman approach, as thinkers like Ron Broglio and Matthew Calarco assert, regards animals in and for themselves, insofar as that is possible (Broglio, “Introduction”; Calarco, *Zoographies*). It follows that such an approach might be called on to recognize a radical otherness in some animals that violates human ethics to the degree that, as humans, we would be disgusted by, even judgmental about given behaviors contrary to our sense of moral behavior. Moving beyond what Paola Cavalieri helpfully calls a “narrow morality” view, one that, as Dawne McCance describes it, “has to do with assessment of interests and with questions of right and wrong” (Cavalieri 9; McCance 135), a more legitimately *posthuman* ethics does not operate simply to solve an immediate problem but rather to deeply unsettle our apprehension of what it means to be human *and* what it might mean to be nonhuman.

For this reason I want to mobilize a working definition of ethics that is less likely to use a baked-in set of (human) moral or ethical judgments (e.g., humans owe nonhumans

protection because of their vulnerability) but that instead views the *phenomenon* of the ethical situation and its *effect* on those involved. By “ethics,” then, I mean a fully present encounter with the other that not only recognizes the radical alterity of that other, but also produces a response, a change, through the encounter, enacted upon the subject by the call of the other, a call that speaks, which is to say communicates unmistakably something absolutely nonhuman about the animal — something that shifts the human slightly away from being human.<sup>2</sup> Several thinkers have contributed to this view, including Derrida and Broglio on the one hand, in what Calarco calls “difference” ethics, and Donna Haraway and Barbara Smuts on the other, who honor difference but find connection with the nonhuman other as definitive of the ethical situation. As Calarco summarizes difference ethics, in *Thinking Through Animals*: “An ethics of difference starts from the premise that the ultimate origin of ethics resides not with me (my rationality, my freedom, my autonomy) but with the Other, with radical difference, or *heteronomy*.... [My ethical response] arises precisely *as a response* to the Other, from a source radically different from me that calls into question my typical ways of thinking and living” (32, emphasis in original). Recognizing a debt to Haraway, he makes a good case for a third possibility with the concept of indistinction: “the indistinction approach aims to think about human beings and animals in deeply relational terms that permit new groupings and new differences to emerge, such that ‘the human’ is no longer the center or chief point of reference” (*Thinking* 56). Whereas nonhuman ethics has typically put the human at the center — and the active position — of the ethical encounter, Calarco suggests that the “zone of indistinction” puts the human in a position of being “*like animals*. To be like an animal is very different from the kind of position associated with the identity framework in which it is argued that animals are *like us*” (58).

I will expand this ethics by attention more particularly to the psycho-philosophical history of thought about modernity’s notions of “presence,” seen as a rather ghostly but “solid” — centered — sense of a unified self. To better recognize Poe’s realization of nonhuman animals *as such*, within encounters that work to develop ethical situations, I want to call his an ethics of co-presence, that is, an ethics that equally involves nonhuman and human animals, inhabiting a subject-position of equal ethical merit. An ethics of co-presence would rely on Derrida’s reading of Freud in Derrida’s “Structure, Sign and Play in the Human Sciences.” Though Derrida was to develop deconstruction more fully over the following couple of decades, this talk was one of the first and most articulate expressions of the critique of humanism that would underwrite so much philosophy and literary theory over the next fifty years. A brief description will suffice because the ideas are now so well-known. Recognizing Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger as counter-examples, Derrida offers a critique of modernity’s notion of

“presence,” the assumption of an essential, knowable entity at the center of any structure or system of meaning. Most useful for my present definition, he highlights Freud’s implicit critique of psychological “self-presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession in the very concept of the unconscious. This rejection of Cartesian thought and methodology carries within it a related rejection of Cartesian dualities, signifier/signified, instinct/reason, human/animal, etc. in the concept of presence such that one takes self-definition by the otherness of the other — the not-me.

In the absence of self-presence, or full consciousness, Freud posited desire — the desire for plenitude, for fullness of self, for self-presence — as the motivating life-force against the anxiety of living with absence (“Beyond the Pleasure Principle”). Such desire is a reaching toward, a longing, according to Freud, for what appears to be full self-presence. Coming around to more contemporary uses of “presence” in animal studies, biologist Smuts writes about just such a “presence” she has seen in the baboons she worked with in the 1970s and ‘80s, and her certainty that “inside this other body, there is ‘someone home’” (“Encounters With Animal Minds” 308). Her sense of this presence has to do, also, with individual baboons who have made contact — sometimes physically reaching out and touching — with her. Interestingly, Haraway misquotes Smuts’s term as “co-presence” in her *When Species Meet*, I believe because “co-presence” captures well the sense of presence that comes about not as a singular, essential self, but in company with another. Haraway takes this kind of encounter a step further, including change in the human animal as a definitive component of real contact. She uses both literal and metaphorical senses of the idea that animals have “face” to account for the possibility of these encounters: “The animals in the labs have face; they are somebody as well as something, just as we humans are both subject and object all the time” (76). Smuts and Haraway take a distinctly different view from that of Derrida, who sees in the eyes of an animal — his cat in “The Animal That Therefore I Am” — “a gaze that is vacant to the extent of being bottomless, at the same time innocent and cruel perhaps, perhaps sensitive and impassive, good and bad, uninterpretable...” (381). To be sure, Derrida’s cat has “face,” but this face is “abyssal and secret,” where Haraway’s and Smuts’s encounters reveal knowledge of the other for both human and nonhuman.

I will adopt Haraway’s happy misquotation, “co-presence,” though by “presence” I mean something perhaps fundamentally different from Smuts’s and Haraway’s adoption. In their work, there is unquestionably something like full self-presence in *both* nonhuman and human in the encounter, where I would return to the Freudian

suggestion that there is no such thing, that something is always hidden from the self (a center that may not in fact exist), and that desire for the other — for connection with the other — seeks to create self-presence, and that *something like self-presence* is approachable only in the co-presence with the radically other. Rather than studying the face of animals, however, I would look more specifically at the mutual gaze in Poe's *Pym*, for it is through looking into the eyes of someone from another other species that Pym, in such co-presence, finds some part of himself that is both alien and recognizable. In short, he becomes more self-present only in these encounters, present not as an individual self but in combination with nonhumans. The ethical situations I will attempt to read in Poe's *Pym* take place *as a result of* and *to initiate* a confusion of subject and object, a confusion of Cartesian categories that does not, after all, confuse the subject, but that rather clarifies by re-positioning both human and nonhuman animal presence. The following sections likewise attempt to clarify by confusion of categories. I first look at wild or undomesticated animals in "The Seagull and Other Birds," but read them as co-presences with humans and, thus, as not-entirely-wild or other-than-human; it is only in human-centered ethics that these kinds of animals appear wholly other. In "Domesticated Animals," I attempt to uncover a wildness running through Pym's anthropomorphized, humanized, domestic dog, Tiger. "The Human Response" draws conclusions about human characters' responses to nonhumans in Poe's work and readers' responses to these encounters.

**The Seagull and Other Birds.** Near the mid-point of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, a dramatic and critical encounter with a seagull transforms the purported humanity of the main characters. In a novel full of dramatic and critical episodes, many involving nonhuman animals of a variety of species, the meeting of Pym, his friend Augustus, fellow counter-mutineer Dirk Peters, and hostage mutineer Parker, with this bird initiates a radical shift in the protagonist and first-person narrator Pym and in the story he narrates. The starving survivors of the *Grampus*, now only a floating hull, have encountered a Dutch ship which they had expected to rescue them. The seagull's presence on the ship has been so far invisible, but it presents itself just as the survivors realize that every human on board is dead. Given its centrality to the narrative and the reading I propose below, the passage bears quoting at length:

As our first loud yell of terror broke forth, it was replied to by something, from near the bowsprit of the stranger, so closely resembling the scream of a human voice that the nicest ear might have been startled and deceived. At this instant another sudden yaw brought the region of the fore-castle for a moment into view, and we beheld at once the origin of the sound. We

saw the tall stout (human) figure still leaning on the bulwark, still nodding his head to and fro, but his face was now turned from us so that we could not behold it. His arms were extended over the rail, and the palms of his hands fell outward. His knees were lodged upon a stout rope, tightly stretched, and reaching from the heel of the bowsprit to a cathead. On his back, from which a portion of the shirt had been torn, leaving it bare, there sat a huge sea-gull, busily gorging itself with the horrible flesh, its bill and talons deep buried, and its white plumage spattered all over with blood. As the brig moved farther round so as to bring us close in view, the bird, with much apparent difficulty, drew out its crimsoned head, and, after eyeing us for a moment as if stupefied, arose lazily from the body upon which it had been feasting, and, flying directly above our deck, hovered there a while with a portion of clotted and liver-like substance in its beak. The horrid morsel dropped at length with a sullen splash immediately at the feet of Parker. May God forgive me, but now, for the first time, there flashed through my mind a thought, a thought which I will not mention, and I felt myself making a step toward the ensanguined spot. I looked upward, and the eyes of Augustus met my own with a degree of intense and eager meaning which immediately brought me to my senses. I sprang forward quickly, and, with a deep shudder, threw the frightful thing into the sea. (132-33)

The encounter with the seagull is initiated by a verbal exchange. The men on board the *Grampus* have yelled, and their yell “was replied to by something ... so closely resembling the scream of a human voice that the nicest ear might have been startled and deceived.” Notably, neither yell nor scream is verbal in the precise meaning of the word, but I choose to call the exchange verbal in the face of the long history of separation of nonhumans from human animals on the basis of language, because both the seagull and the men derive meaning from, give attention to, and take action in response to the sound the other makes, as is the case with language, human or otherwise.<sup>3</sup> The bird, who has been “gorging” on the dead sailor, is presumably drawn away from its task by the human yell; Pym does anthropomorphize the seagull, reading it in human terms, immediately and with some emphasis, by reporting that the “something” the men hear is so like “the scream of a human voice” that it makes no difference, in effect, that it is not different: “the nicest ear might have been startled and deceived.” Importantly, the men’s yell is “replied to” in an exchange; Pym does not read the two non-verbal sounds as empty of communication value. Yet rather than

humanizing the seagull with his anthropomorphic first reading, what begins with the yell of the humans and the reply of the animal quickly alters Pym's human point of view. The *Grampus* crew are drawn by the bird's scream to see what appears at first to be a human, the sailor, who, albeit dead, is moving in ways that have appeared and still appear to be motivated by life. The dead sailor is "nodding his head to and fro," a nonverbal type of communication, while his hands are also placed — though accidentally — in a welcoming gesture, "arms ... extended over the rail," with the palms facing "outward." Pym reads these gestures as signifying like language, despite (soon) knowing the sailor is dead; this reading can only take place because the seagull is "gorging itself with the horrible flesh, its bill and talons deep buried." It is the bird who communicates with the men, who calls them to attention and to the understanding that it — the bird — has been motivating the gestures and nods of the sailor all along.

Again, Pym — and Poe — anthropomorphize the seagull, but despite the human-like communication that has been established between bird and men, it is *as an animal* — as fundamentally nonhuman — that the men engage with the bird: the act of "gorging" on the sailor precipitates the response of horror as much as that the people of the Dutch ship are all dead. Eating a human produces visceral horror, even when it is a nonhuman doing the eating. Pym is stunned, transfixed, his engagement total as he watches the bird's next moves: "the bird, with much apparent difficulty, drew out its crimsoned head, and, after eyeing us for a moment as if stupefied, arose lazily from the body upon which it had been feasting...." After its call, the seagull, significantly, looks at the men, then, evidently satiated, moves toward them, "flying directly above our deck, hovered there a while with a portion of clotted and liver-like substance in its beak." And in a gesture much discussed in Poe scholarship, the bird drops the "horrid morsel" on the deck of the *Grampus*, where it falls at Parker's feet.

With this act, the seagull has addressed their need, wittingly or not; it has *seen* them, in the sense that Derrida describes in "The Animal that Therefore I Am." In Derrida's encounter, as is well known, he responds to his cat looking at him naked. Two simultaneous understandings need to be drawn from this encounter: that the cat assesses the human animal — seems to judge, and thus the shame and vulnerability Derrida feels on being seen naked — and that the cat remains, for Derrida, fully other, "uninterpretable, unreadable, undecidable, abyssal and secret" (381).<sup>4</sup> The seagull's response in *Pym* combines the anthropomorphic ability to see and seemingly assess — as Derrida's cat sees him naked, "with a view to seeing," which is to say a view to apprehending if not understanding — while its eating of human flesh renders it absolutely other, in the act of violating the human animal's taboo of eating humans.

Fully engrossed in this encounter, Pym and Augustus seem to enter the seagull's point of view. Despite the horrified first response, both men respond by considering, for the first time, that they, too, might eat a human to stay alive: "there flashed through my mind a thought, a thought which I will not mention, and I felt myself making a step toward the ensanguined spot. I looked upward, and the eyes of Augustus met my own with a degree of intense and eager meaning which immediately brought me to my senses." Seeing that Augustus is also considering eating the "horrid morsel," Pym recoils from the thought and the act, and "threw the frightful thing into the sea." The thought, however, lodges in their minds, and it isn't long before the four survivors draw lots to determine which "one of us should die to preserve the existence of the others" (141). Their encounter with the bird has dislodged their sense of the human as sacrosanct. The encounter and the cannibalism it facilitates have "laid entirely prostrate every active faculty of mind and body. We had seen and felt, but we could neither think nor act" (133). Cannibalism was a common component of lost-at-sea narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; the most well-known might be Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which responded to and helped produce the trope of the cannibalizing other, usually the dark-skinned, alien people whose territory the white sailor has attempted or succeeded in colonizing. What arguably contributed to the disgusted reaction to *Pym*, immediately and until the present day, is that the cannibalism is performed not by the *other*, but by the protagonist.<sup>5</sup>

The encounter with the seagull, it could be argued, involves what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari have termed, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, "becoming-animal," which Calarco has helpfully glossed as not

actually *being* an animal. Becoming-animal and challenging anthropocentrism is not a matter ... of imitating or identifying with animals. Rather, it is a matter of being transformed by an encounter with nonhuman perspectives. Becoming-animal is thus better understood in terms of symbiosis, affect, alliance, and contagion between beings that are usually identified as distinctly "human" and "animal." (*Zoographies* 42)

The reason I have begun with the transformative engagement with the seagull in *Pym* has to do with this sense of animal-human engagement: Deleuze and Guattari position "the animal" as neither at an "abyssal" distance from the human nor in terms of biological (or social) continualism. What they describe here is an aspect of what I've called co-presence, something like a mutual understanding that might lead to a more

complete sense of self/presence.<sup>6</sup> Arthur Gordon Pym's engagement with the seagull unravels a human-centered ontology, even as Pym anthropomorphizes the bird: he recognizes the otherness of this other — its ability to feast on a human without hesitation — even though the bird communicates as something like a human and, more importantly, appears to assess the humans and act on them. The bird is the subject of this encounter, is able to initiate contact, and to reposition those it contacts. As such, the seagull is neither human nor nonhuman, in the classic division of the two concepts, just as the humans of this episode are not entirely the objects of the encounter. Though I fully subscribe to Deleuze and Guattari's idea of multiplicity, of becoming-animal, despite their critique of Freud's Oedipalizing of animals we should also recognize that Freud did allow that an overwhelming otherness of the other does not preclude recognizing one's own, human, similarities with the other — in fact, the uncanny effect of some gothic interactions, as Freud well knew, involved just this kind of double exposure in human experience: the encounter of the other in the self, the *Unheimlich* within the *Heimlich*, by definition creates the vertiginous experience Freud called the uncanny ("The Uncanny"). One more comment by Calarco can summarize becoming-animal in this episode and the ethical potential of the encounter I have described: the "contestation of anthropocentrism and human chauvinism and the privileging of animality should be taken as evidence of a fascination for something 'outside' or other than the human and dominant perspectives (and this 'outside' might well lie within human beings, for example, in an inhuman space at the very heart of what we call human)" (*Zoographies* 43). As we can see in *Pym*, the "inhuman" act of cannibalism can travel from bird to human, can call to the nonhuman within.

Other birds in this novel range from a passing albatross — no doubt a human-oriented figure more than a singular nonhuman in its allusion to the recently (for Poe) published "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," which Poe knew and admired — to unknown and unnamed all-white and all-black birds, to a gathering of penguins and albatross in a rookery about which Pym has much to say. It is this latter I want to read closely, for while Pym's viewing of the rookery does not have the same ethical consequences as his encounter with the seagull, it does represent these animals as multiplicities, as neither fully human nor fully nonhuman, much as the seagull was, and in so doing offers the encounter with these birds as an ethical challenge that shifts, however slightly, Pym's sense of the meaning of humanity. Poe notoriously lifted much of this several-page description of the rookery from Benjamin Morrell's 1832 *Narrative of Four Voyages*, one of two sources he cribbed for several descriptive so-called digressions in *Pym*, in a bid to shore up the hoax of its being a factual narrative; that being the case, the narrative perception of these animal-others ought to be significantly different from that in the

earlier scene that Poe invented.<sup>7</sup> Pym, however, interweaves with the Morrell description a response of mystery and wonder, offering if not a meaning then an effect of the human-like design of the rookery.<sup>8</sup> Among the things that fascinate Pym in this passage is the precise geometric design within which the two species cohabit and keep their eggs. After choosing an appropriate spot near the sea, “with one accord” and “actuated apparently by one mind,” the birds create paths that cross each other at right angles over a space of three or four acres (167). “At each intersection of these paths the nest of an albatross is constructed and a penguin’s nest in the center of each square — thus every penguin is surrounded by four albatrosses, and each albatross by a like number of penguins” (168). Both species have “thievish propensities ... making no scruple to purloin each other’s eggs at every good opportunity” (168-69). Other, smaller birds nest among them, “enjoying all the privileges of citizenship” (169). As with the seagull, Pym anthropomorphizes these birds, seeing in them human-like behavior and reasoning, but — and this is my point — it is the very anthropomorphic qualities that mystify Pym, given the alien otherness of the species, in the Poe-authored part of the passage: “nothing can be more astonishing than the spirit of reflection evinced by these feathered beings, and nothing surely can be better calculated to elicit reflection in every well-regulated human intellect” (169). As with the seagull, these birds produce a response in the humans, though this response is “reflection” rather than the affective horror and subsequent change in ethical behavior we saw the seagull produce. One can guess that the subject of such reflection would be the uncanny similarity between these nonhumans and humans like Pym.

As the *Jane Guy*, the ship that has rescued Pym and Peters from the floating hull of the *Grampus*, travels southward, they encounter all-white, very large sea birds that Pym has no name for — and without names, they remain a (largely unexplored) mystery to him.<sup>9</sup> More significantly, on and around the island of Tsalal, the southernmost island north of the South Pole, the men encounter all-black albatross. That they are an identifiable species, but black, heightens their strangeness: “To our astonishment we saw black albatross among these birds in a state of entire domestication, going to sea periodically for food, but always returning to the village as a home” (196). The islanders on Tsalal are also black — indeed, so black that everything about them and surrounding them is black. For more than a generation, many scholars have read these islanders, in fact the whole of *Pym*, as commentary on slavery in the American South. Whether read as a pro-slavery diatribe about the “diabolical” nature of nonwhite people (Toni Morrison, e.g.), or as a critique of the institution of slavery (Joan Dayan), the people of Tsalal are without doubt rendered as radically other: they are described as primitive in language

and housing; they do not understand nor can they tolerate anything white; their customs — including eating the entrails of live animals — are met by the white characters as disgusting.<sup>10</sup> All of the animals native to the island are black, and their being black might be read as simply representations of the radical alterity of the entire island of Tsalal. It is striking, however, that the black birds here are named, not unknown: they are albatross. Not wholly alien, then, but rather seeming adaptations of a white species to the blackness surrounding them.<sup>11</sup> Along with their difference in color, their wildness appears to have been tamed, as they are here domesticated. It seems Pym's astonishment comes about because of this multiplicity, the known and named, ordinary albatross of poetry and lore, which can be known and deployed as a literary and mythical figure, combined with the absolute otherness of their blackness and domestication. These birds do not produce a shift in Pym's perspective on a par with the seagull, but in their radical animality combined with understandability, both *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich* like the seagull and the rookery birds, they astonish Pym into questioning his prior categories.<sup>12</sup>

As though to put into relief such engagements with what we might call feral, at least undomesticated animals, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* also involves another type of animal encounter, one that might be construed as Deleuze and Guattari's "Oedipalized wolf or dog," the "analyst's bow-wow," or in other words, domesticated animals whose proximity as pets to humans have typically rendered them mere human-like adjuncts to humans. The domesticated animal in Deleuze and Guattari is in no way other, nor is it much more than a figure for human characteristics, desires, or anxieties. Many pets in Poe's work, however, are more layered; among the domesticated characteristics of Poe's pets is a trace of something profoundly unexplainable and alien, something unreadable by Poe's characters and readers alike. When Pym stows away on the *Grampus* to begin his adventure at sea, Augustus sneaks Pym's Newfoundland, Tiger, on board as a surprise for his friend. In the next section, I will examine Tiger's appearance and disappearance, his iconic stature as a pet combined with the wildness embedded in his character, to return us to the idea of the co-present ethical encounter between not-entirely-animals and not-entirely-humans.

**The Domesticated Animal.** Generations of Poe scholars and college students alike, the people who most commonly read *Pym*, react to Tiger's appearance with confusion bordering on frustration. A stowaway, Pym is hidden away in the hold of the *Grampus*. Augustus has supplied him with several days' worth of food, drink, and reading materials. After a bizarre eight or so days, involving three-day sleeping spells and starvation (the food has spoiled and the water turned verminous), Pym wakes from a

dream or hallucination in which a lion has pinned him down and is on the verge of eating him, to find that it is his own dog, Tiger, who has appeared out of nowhere, and who now in fact is on top of his master, pinning him down but licking his face. “My dream, then, was not all a dream,” Pym writes, though owing to the ironic logic of dreams, the lion has become a “tiger.” The moment of recognition bears some scrutiny here, especially considered alongside the moment Pym first encounters the seagull, not long after the episode with Tiger. “I was bewildered, utterly lost in amazement — but I could not forget the peculiar whine of my Newfoundland dog, Tiger, and the odd manner of his caresses I well knew” (66). This encounter produces an uncanny blend of the familiar and unfamiliar, but not the focused attention and observation occasioned by the seagull. After the moment’s confusion, “I experienced a sudden rush of blood to my temples — a giddy and overpowering sense of deliverance and reanimation” (66). The seagull produces in Pym, first, a new, cannibalistic thought, second, revulsion and the impulsive act of throwing the “liver-like substance” into the sea, and third, as I have argued, the shift in ethical behavior to allow for Pym’s cannibalism. With Tiger, on the other hand, “throwing [himself] upon the neck of my faithful follower and friend, [Pym] relieved the long oppression of [his] bosom in a flood of the most passionate tears” (66-67). Tiger is first and foremost familiar, so domesticated that Pym responds to him as if the dog were a parent: he cries on the dog’s shoulder. Unlike the other animals in *Pym*, Tiger is a pet, he has a name, and importantly, he and Pym have a history.

Typical of the pet dog, Tiger is represented as the human’s loyal defender: Pym rescued Tiger as a puppy from some “malignant little villains” who were set on drowning him; Tiger “repaid the obligation, about three years afterward, by saving [him] from the bludgeon of a street robber” (67). We actually see Tiger’s heroics shortly after this point in the narrative when, during a counter-mutiny wherein Pym, Peters, and Augustus take the ship back from several mutineers, Tiger saves Augustus’s life by ripping out the throat of an attacker; for a domesticated creature, this action is rather at the violent end of the spectrum of human *and* nonhuman behavior. But also typical of the pet dog of myth and lore, Tiger is extremely smart and communicative. Down in the hold, he eventually makes Pym understand that he, the dog, is carrying a message from Augustus tied around his chest with a string, and of course, the message saves Pym’s life by warning him to stay below in the hold while mutineers have control of the ship. Their history together has resulted in this ease of communication. Even more than the seagull in *Pym*, Tiger is anthropomorphized; his valued characteristics — loyalty, reasonableness, and communication skills — are human-like. His life with Pym has humanized him, given him the status of companion insofar as he has behaved like a

human. Even when he becomes ill and shows signs of being rabid, frightening Pym by showing his teeth, drooling, and growling, it turns out that he has suffered from the toxic atmosphere of the hold in the same way Pym has done, recovering as quickly as Pym himself. In keeping with the Oedipalized “dog in the kennel” — that is to say, the owned and domesticated animal that serves as a figure for humanity — Tiger does not in fact attack his owner, but rather resists the urge.

And yet there are qualities and narrative phenomena associated with Tiger in *Pym* that can neither be humanized nor explained by any human logic. Not only does he appear out of nowhere, he also disappears without explanation or afterthought. The narrative oddity of this appearance and disappearance is one of the frustrations readers experience in reading the novel. What happened to Tiger? most readers ask. After all he has meant to Pym, when he disappears, he is never mentioned again. We can only conjecture that he has washed overboard with the rest of the ship’s supplies; that he disappears isn’t mentioned at all. Conspicuous in this detail is the fact that Tiger is a Newfoundland. This breed was popular along the early nineteenth-century U.S. Eastern seaboard. Yet it is puzzling that Tiger is so pointedly created as a Newfoundland when Newfoundlands were and are renowned for their fantastic swimming abilities, owing to their great strength and webbed feet.<sup>13</sup>

Why would a dog of a breed famous for water expertise disappear by being washed overboard? Another unexplained oddity of Tiger’s appearance and disappearance is connected to the cannibalism discussed earlier. As thirty years of my students alone have asked, when the characters are starving, why don’t they eat the dog? This is not a naïve question, and in fact follows logically from the Western world’s generally Cartesian view of “the animal”: considered radically “other” to the human, “the animal” is often considered food. In extreme circumstances, even the pet might be considered food, following this logic.<sup>14</sup> Tiger’s disappearance from Pym is generally considered an oversight on Poe’s part, yet the presence of so many other animals in the novel — and the attention the narrative affords them as *subjects* — asks us to consider Tiger in the same spirit as these others. As a pet, Tiger is *ordinary* from the human point of view, by which I mean he doesn’t require explanation because he is an adjunct to or extension of human subjectivity. The only-pet, being produced by human need, does occupy an ethical position, but it is one that typically locates the human as the active subject of the ethical situation.<sup>15</sup> Yet Tiger is not only a pet. He is to some degree undomesticated, undisciplined phenomenologically, in that he never occupies Pym’s mind other than when they are together; he is not mentioned before or after his short

stay on the *Grampus*. The trace of the unknowable or unnameable sticks to this most domesticated of animals in the novel.

Tiger, like the undomesticated seagull, offers what Derrida might consider an “excess” of signification — that trace of indeterminateness beyond the two terms of any binary, “which overflows the totality of that which can be thought, the totality of beings and determined meanings...” (*Writing and Difference* 57, emphasis added). Thoroughly domesticated, Tiger nevertheless also bears traits of the nonhuman, unreasoning — which is to say instinct-driven — animal. His “loyalty,” for example, though it could work against his own self-preservation, appears to be out of his own control: he can’t help but protect his master. His instinct appears to *be* his “better reason,” at least as far as his service to Pym goes. His mysterious appearance and disappearance suggest some motive other than thought as humans know it. He appears when he is most needed, and disappears when he is not. Tiger is domesticated, but his “strangeness” is not, as Calarco might put it (*Thinking* 31). The radical alterity of the nonhuman is preserved in Tiger even in his most domesticated characteristics. Not unlike Derrida’s cat, Tiger, finally, is “an existence that refuses to be categorized” (“The Animal” 9).

Pym’s Tiger and the seagull appearing soon after perform the work of co-presence in this novel; to different degrees, they permanently affect the humans due to their presence as *other*, shifting the human away from what had been assumed to be humanity. What might be this “work of co-presence”? In addition to the ethical encounter, and perhaps because of it, in literary-critical terms co-presence may accompany any number of odd narrative effects, including the narrative forgetfulness surrounding Tiger. In the epigraph to this essay, Elena Passarello suggests that while images of nonhuman animals are “buried inside us,” collective memory of animals is not held “in the brain, but in marrow and fiber and peptide” (15). Passarello here recognizes the connectedness of the human and nonhuman, but locates the connection elsewhere than in the usual utilitarian or rights-based biological or behavioral continualism that underwrites most arguments in favor of connectedness. Passarello’s “memory” resides “far into the flesh, where the temporal world starts to wobble a bit.” Her suggestive temporal “wobble” surely refers to the long history and pre-history of nonhuman-human association on earth, a time-line so ancient that the sense of history is extinguished, leaving only a kind of ongoing real presence. Still, I prefer to extend her wobbly temporality to an understanding of narrative itself, in particular to the kind of novel-narrative whose very generic definition depends on chronology; even in novels in which chronology is presented out of order (Faulkner’s work comes to mind) cause and

effect still operates, though it is harder to identify what causes what. In a text like *Pym*, however, the chronology is standardized. This book, after all, was designed and offered as a faux-sea-narrative of the kind that was popular during Poe's lifetime. It isn't cause and effect that is destabilized by the presence of some of *Pym*'s nonhumans, but rather the temporality of consciousness usually presented in both novels and sea-narratives: conventional foreshadowings and/or explanations of events at a very basic level. Ron Broglio suggested something like this in an April 2018 meeting of the Chicago Animal Studies workshop, in his pithy comment that "animals rupture narrative."<sup>16</sup> Tiger's presence, and especially his disappearance without a trace of narrative/narrator memory, I suggest comes about as a result of the co-present status of animals in this novel. Tiger, the named pet, unsettles the narrative sense of *consciousness-as-narrative*, and is followed shortly by the ethical encounter with the seagull; indeed, it could be argued that Pym's openness to being called by the seagull, and thus interpellated into the ethical point of view of this bird, is prepared by Tiger's surprising appearance and disappearance — the unexplained and unexplainable otherness of even the family pet.

**The Human Response.** Poe wrote about many nonhumans in many places — "The Raven," "The Black Cat," "Murders in the Rue Morgue," "Hop-Frog," "The Thousand and Second Tale of Scheherazade," to name just a few — which Poe scholars have usefully read in deeply historical contexts, most recently as animal analogues to Africans and African Americans.<sup>17</sup> These are and were well-known and, in many ways, *accountable* works: their animals have proliferated studied and useful readings since their first publication. *Arthur Gordon Pym* has been as studied, yet its animals have remained somehow less accountable, often ignored, I believe, because they refuse to satisfy either literal or figurative literary readings. It was arguably one of Poe's least successful undertakings. He was prompted to write *Pym* only after his editor at *The Southern Literary Messenger* told him that novels were selling better than short stories, and that he should write a novel. It clearly was not Poe's best medium; in fact, he seemed to toss the thing together out of plagiarized odds and ends of other books, almost to spite Thomas White, the editor. Perhaps because of its bespoke origin, *Pym* is a rather raw composition, the first parts serialized in the Messenger in two issues late in 1837, and the full text published the following year. Poe later called it "a very silly book" (letter to William Burton, 1 June 1840). It is also the single piece of Poe's work to include so many animals in so many liminal and central positions, as if, to quote Passarello again, all of these nonhumans had come to occupy not so much Poe's mind as his "marrow and fiber and peptide" (15).

Arthur Gordon Pym can be said to be emotionally and intellectually altered by his encounters with birds that are not figures but also not abysally unknowable, that are singular nonhumans, through the last scenes of the novel, by which time Pym has become an increasingly passive character: by the last scenes of the novel, he can no longer be bothered even to pick up a white, unidentified animal floating by, though he is as hungry as ever. He has responded to the call and the gaze of the nonhuman other, becoming the *object* of the ethical encounter. Pym's change is less recognizably ethical in the typically *human* sense associated with moral behavior; his change involves, rather, "symbiosis" and "contagion" (Deleuze and Guattari) as a result of these animal encounters, producing less-attractive, less agential behaviors on this narrator's part — even his cannibalism is foisted on him by others. Several theorists and critics have linked passivity and vulnerability in the ethical situations that obtain among humans and nonhumans.<sup>18</sup> As Dawne McCance unpacks Derrida's "The Animal," she notes the passivity that he, among other things, suggests in his title "The Animal that Therefore I am (more to follow)." In *following*, the human becomes the ethical object, in particular the object of a gaze: passivity is "destabilizing brought about by seeing oneself being seen through the eyes of the other, through the eyes of an animal, an experience through which the self, stripped of the mantle of autonomous first-person author, is called on as an addressee, as one who comes after" (McCance 69). She describes an ethics closely aligned with my reading of *Pym's* animals: "ethics finds itself in this position of being-seen and of not-knowing, of not having the power, the *capacity*, to name or define 'the animal'" (146). Following his encounters with animals, Pym is "stripped bare of the mantle of autonomous first-person author."

One of the marks of humanism was in Poe's era and is now the idea of human progress, marked against the backdrop of nature — and its nonhuman animals — as largely unchanging. What I've called an ethics of co-presence in Poe's work can serve both to support his era's human-centered ethics *and* to undermine it; in this co-presence, Pym-as-character and Pym-as-narrator shifts away from the intentionality expected of the human subject, just as he has abdicated his responsibility as narrator to anticipate and reflect on events like the disappearance of his dog. The realization of the self Pym undergoes through his encounters with animals provides a model for the decentering of the human, which, given the baseline humanism of Poe's readership, produced reactions of horror and disgust. The narrative consequences of Poe's kind of animal-human encounter equally bewildered his readers and readers ever since. The failure of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* could well be connected to Pym's failure to perform

his nineteenth-century duties as a first-person narrator, as one who knows, who does the seeing, and who can explain what he sees.

## Notes

1. Dominic Mastroianni's "Hospitality and the Thresholds of the Human in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*" is one of just a couple of publications exclusively on nonhumans and this novel. While Mastroianni reads *Pym*'s animal-human "thresholds" as permeable and changing — a position I support fully — his focus is on nineteenth-century concepts of hospitality, while mine is on ethics. Jeremy MacFarlane convincingly reads the cannibalism in *Pym* as indicative of the title character's transition to animality: the "shipwrecked sailors cease to be human. They follow the lead of animals, eat the flesh they thought only animals could eat, and reveal that they are, at heart, animals" ("Eating Like an Animal" 28). MacFarlane sees the animals in *Pym* in the "subhuman" light that most nineteenth-century Americans did (37), while I take the posthuman position that animals can operate on ethical grounds of equality. Though nonhuman animals are not the center of her argument, Joan Dayan remarks that Poe's thresholds are mutable, as seen in "experiences that trade on unspeakable slippages between men and women, humans and animals, life and death" ("Amorous Bondage" 244). However, her subject is "animality" and the human-beast association in liminal beings, "lunatics, women, primates, black men, and children" (244). Colleen Glenney Boggs likewise mentions *Pym* and the "permeability of thresholds" between human and animal (*Animalia Americana* 120) in her wide-ranging study of animals as constitutive of liberal humanism.

2. The call, here, should recall Louis Althusser's concept of the "hail" as best described in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*: "ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects" (by which he means human subjects). Insofar as interpellation is, according to Althusser, ideology, the ethical call of a nonhuman operates exactly like the hail that brings subjects into ideology; indeed, the kind of ethics I am describing has the possibility of shifting one out of human ideology into something else, another ideology. However, for reasons of space and simplicity, and because critical animal studies uses the term "call" instead of "hail," I will use "call" throughout this essay.

3. Mastroianni thoughtfully reads the men's yell and the bird's response as neither language nor intentional action: the men's shout is only a helpless ejaculation, and the seagull's cry is but "vocalization." He sees that the gull's "intentions, if it has any, have nothing to do with promoting human welfare" (191), whereas my reading suggests that

the actions of the bird — particularly dropping the “horrid morsel” onto the deck of the *Grampus* — provoke an ethical response that is read by the men as if it were intentional; the men take the suggestion of cannibalism, whether the bird intends it or not. I agree that “the gull figures not only the nonhuman, but also an uncertainty about what is human” (193), and with Mastroianni’s larger point about the “transformability” of human into animal, particularly the capacity of the human to turn cannibal: “the transformability of the concept of humanity has everything to do with the human body’s susceptibility to being eaten and incorporated by another animal” (194).

4. Even as early as 1974, Thomas Nagel proposed a similar unknowability of another’s consciousness of a nonhuman animal in “What is it Like to be a Bat?”

5. White cannibalism is “reported on” by factual and fictional accounts other than Pym. See, for example, Maggie Kilgour’s *From Communion to Cannibalism* and bell hooks’ “Eating the Other” chapter in her *Black Looks* (21-39). Such reports often include a set-piece involving the drawing of lots to decide who is to be eaten. Kilgour notes, in fact, that it was usually the one African remaining on board who “happened” to draw the short straw.

6. Ironically, Deleuze and Guattari’s position here and in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is distinctly anti-Freud. To take just one example, from *A Thousand Plateaus*, they famously deride the anthropomorphism of pets: the “Oedipalized wolf or dog, the castrated-castrating daddy-wolf, the dog in the kennel, the analyst’s bow-wow” (29). Their ideas regarding multiplicity and “the pack” (among human and nonhuman animals) serve as a corrective to what they see as Freud’s Oedipal understanding of singular identity. I believe Derrida, however, reads Freud in a more nuanced way, as he sees in the very concept of the unconscious the idea of non-self-presence, which of course is not the same as Deleuze and Guattari’s “pack,” but which lays a foundation for understanding the “self” as non-singular.

7. Poe invented the ship-of-the-dead scene, though it strongly alludes to the Flying Dutchman story of myth and legend.

8. Morrell does compare the penguins he found to soldiers in bearing, among other anthropomorphisms, as when the female penguin makes room for “her partner in cares and pleasures” (52). Poe anthropomorphizes them in different terms, concluding only that these birds’ design elicits “reflection,” while Morrell makes of them a model for

human marriage. Notably, Morrell's account also reports on a visit to "the Massacre Islands, where thirteen of the author's crew were massacred and eaten by cannibals" (title page).

9. Haraway contributes a great deal to the important understanding of "named," as opposed to unnamed animals, which for reasons of space I will omit in this argument. See *When Species Meet*.

10. South of Tsalal, Pym encounters all-white, unnamed birds whose call is "Tekeli-li!" "Tekeli-li!" is also apparently the Tsalalians' word for "white"; we see this clearly when the islanders shout this word whenever they see anything white, at which time they look or even run away. Pym seems obtusely unaware of the connection between the word and the thing: he never mentions the connection.

11. Pym's response to the people on Tsalal is similarly confounded: he recognizes them as human but not entirely so. On the subject of nineteenth-century comparisons of dark people with animals, see bell hooks, *Black Looks*, Colleen Glenn Boggs, *Animalia Americana*, and Joan (Colin) Dayan, "Amorous Bondage," along with Nancy Isenberg's recent *White Trash*.

12. Poe's best known bird is, of course, the titular character of "The Raven." While this poem has the makings of an ethical encounter in the sense I have been discussing, given that the raven does call to the speaker, who does respond initially as to an other, it is by and large a figure — adjunct to and mirror of the human — not a real animal. In short, it is a poem and an animal about the human. Indeed, Poe wrote in "The Philosophy of Composition," an essay in which he purports to explain how he came to write "The Raven," that the bird symbolizes "Mournful and never ending Remembrance" (167).

13. Meriwether Lewis famously took his Newfie, Seaman, along on the expedition from the Mississippi River to the Pacific and back. So beloved was Seaman that, when he suffered from a beaver bite, Lewis and Clark performed surgery on one of his arteries ("Seaman," National Park Service, retrieved 8/20/18). Poe had read the account of this expedition and may well have known about Seaman or the Newfoundland breed even prior to that reading. On Poe's reading of Lewis and Clark's Journal, see, for example, Burton Pollin's "Poe's Life Reflected through the Sources of *Pym*" (*Poe's Pym*).

14. The Corps of Discovery, a special unit of the U.S. Army that accompanied Lewis and Clark, ate two hundred dogs during the 1804-06 expedition, but they spared Seaman

("Seaman: Lewis's Newfoundland Dog" retrieved 8-20-18). They likely spared the dog because of Lewis's fierce attachment to him.

15. Utilitarian and rights-based theorists such as Singer and Regan are prototypical in this human-centered ethics.

16. Julia Kristeva offers a somewhat useful but finally limited description of the relationship among the "abject" — the putrid, disgusting, the not-me repressed by the unconscious — narrative disruption, and the horror effect: "when the boundary between subject and object is shaken, and when even the limit between inside and outside becomes uncertain, the narrative is what is challenged first," she says in *Powers of Horror* (141). My argument has pointed out the uncertain boundary between human and nonhuman as potentially productive of horror, but from a very different position than Kristeva's. She limits horror to the presence of the abject, and while in *Pym* there are disgusting enough scenes to produce an abject response, I argue that it is the ethical situation of co-presence between human and nonhuman that tilts the narrative off its axis, so to speak — not exclusively the horror-content of the *mise-en-scene*.

17. See especially Emmy Stark Zitter's comprehensive analysis of animals and race anxiety in Poe's stories ("Language, Race, and Authority").

18. See *Philosophy and Animal Life*, in which Cary Wolfe, Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, John McDonald, and Ian Hacking, read J.M. Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* in terms of human and animal vulnerability, both potentially the object of ethical encounters.

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