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The American Antecedents of James De Mille's A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder

In his influential essay on James De Mille, published in the *Canadian Magazine* for September 1906,¹ Archibald MacMechan was at pains to point out the distinctively national qualities in the life and writings of the late author. Impatiently dismissing as unfounded the rumors then in circulation that De Mille had been "one of our Canadians who went over to the United States", MacMechan deemphasized his subject's various contacts with American life and stressed instead his responses to the culture of Europe. For example, summarizing the primary formative influences on the imagination of the young Canadian, he discounted De Mille's stimulating years between 1852 and 1854 as a student at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island; a still earlier tour of Europe, he affirmed, had exerted a shaping effect whose sustained force it "would be hard to overestimate". Elsewhere in the essay, specifying the novelists whose works had served as models for the literary practice of the mature De Mille — the great majority of whose writings were first published in the United States — he mentioned Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, Eugene Sue, and Jules Verne — European figures only.² Paradoxically, in his determination to establish the purity of his subject's Canadianism, MacMechan appears to have defined him by a kind of selective association with the cultures of other lands, thus: a Canadian-European, yes; a Canadian-American, by no means. Many features of De Mille's life history, notably his ardent patriotic sentiments as a youth and his fruitful association with Acadia College and Dalhousie College during the twenty years which preceded his sudden death in 1880, do of course go far toward confirming the contention that he felt a deep and continuing attachment to the land of his origin. However, now that the author's national identity is no longer

a point at issue, the limitations in MacMechan's method of setting forth his thesis are readily apparent. By passing over as inconsequential De Mille's experiences in the United States and awareness of things American, he ran a serious risk of failing to achieve a balanced assessment of him as a Canadian writer.

In the entire canon of De Mille's writings, no work demonstrates more clearly the seminal importance of his reading in American literature than the one which, ironically, MacMechan himself and more recent commentators as well have characterized as his most impressive performance: the posthumous *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*.³ The novel includes overwhelming evidence of its author's indebtedness to the works of three American writers of the generation before his: Edgar Allan Poe, William H. Prescott, and Herman Melville. Consequently, a study of De Mille's adaptations in *A Strange Manuscript* from the writings of these three figures promises to shed new light on the genesis of his most ambitious effort in fiction and also to promote a fuller awareness of his literary relationships than has as yet prevailed. A comparative analysis of this sort constitutes, moreover, a unique occasion for explication of the novel in itself. De Mille responded to and ignored, borrowed wholesale and in various ways modified material from the writings of all three authors, and in each instance he implicitly revealed certain of his own literary instincts and aims. Examining *A Strange Manuscript* in relation to the works of the three earlier figures produces an effect analogous to a composite image gradually made visible on a screen by projecting its constituent parts, each fragmentary in itself, from three separate points of illumination. The process brings into focus De Mille's intentions and strategies in the novel, and it enables us to discern some of the dominant patterns of his mind and art.

I

The influence of Poe is evident in several of De Mille's published writings,⁴ but it is nowhere more pervasively apparent than in the early chapters of *A Strange Manuscript* — whose title, as if at once to acknowledge such a relationship, echoes that of the American writer's "MS. Found in a Bottle". The titular allusion is well chosen, for in the body of the novel De Mille draws primarily upon Poe's *tour de force* in

the genre of fantastic travel accounts to which "MS. Found in a Bottle" belongs, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838).⁵ After almost identical self-introductions by their respective protagonists ("My name is Arthur Gordon Pym. My father was a respectable trader in sea-stores at Nantucket" [p.5]; "My name is Adam More. I am the son of Henry More, apothecary, Keswick, Cumberland" [p.27]), both travel narratives relate in straightforward, studiously prosaic style the events in sea-voyages southward which culminate in disaster. In describing the journeys, Pym and More both specify meticulously their latitudes and longitudes at various points; and in detailing their dire situations upon being separated from the ships, they both reveal an impressive knowledge of their probable whereabouts in relation to the recent progress of exploration in sub-Antarctic regions (see *Pym*, pp. 152-53, 159-77; *A Strange Manuscript*, pp. 27, 36). As their frail crafts drift into territory as yet unexplored, both notice with surprise that the bitter climate appears gradually to be moderating and that the ocean currents are sweeping them further southward with increasing speed (*Pym*, p. 177; *A Strange Manuscript*, p. 40).⁶ Presently they both descrie a group of dark-skinned savages on a nearby beach, and after some cautious hesitation, they both land among them. In each book these persons at first make elaborate demonstrations of hospitality and good will but soon prove to be treacherous murderers, from whose attacks the protagonists narrowly escape to their boats (*Pym*, pp. 181-235; *A Strange Manuscript*, pp. 43-52). At last, passing into regions still more remote, Pym and More witness awesome prodigies of nature. Pym, impelled with "hideous velocity" through a sea "of milky consistency and hue", notices "sudden and extensive agitations" of its previously "smooth" surface. Looming before him he sees what he likens to "a limitless cataract, rolling silently into the sea". The sky darkens, and at that moment his boat rushes "into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm [throws] itself open to receive" him (pp. 240-42). Adam More recounts a comparable experience. Floating "swiftly" through a channel of smoothly rushing water in which "there was *no* phosphorescent sparkle of seething waters, and *no* whiteness of foam" [*italics mine*], he conceives of himself as nearing "the brink of some tremendous cataract a thousand times deeper than Niagara". All grows dark, and he is then "flung into some tremendous cavern" (pp. 53-54). Pym's narrative of course breaks off immediately after his

strange catastrophe, while the greater part of More's adventures is yet to be told. Nevertheless, it is clear that in the portions of *A Strange Manuscript* just summarized, De Mille has modelled his account rather openly upon *Pym*.

Prior to Adam More's description of his great plunge, De Mille draws almost programmatically and often without significant alteration from *Pym* alone; in More's account of his experiences immediately after that event, the pattern of indebtedness to Poe becomes somewhat more complex. Here De Mille presents a scene which is virtually a compound of features generally associated with the fiction of the earlier writer. For example, not only More's outward plight — being caught up in a "stupendous" natural phenomenon, "borne onward helplessly by the resistless tide" of a subterranean river toward "a mysterious and appalling doom" (p. 57) — but also his portentous account of it recall the self-described predicaments of the oceangoing protagonists in Poe's "A Descent Into the Maelstrom" and "MS. Found in a Bottle". In other respects his situation and his reaction to it suggest those of various Poe heroes who, upon being isolated in fearful surroundings, discover with terrified consternation that their organs of sense perception are practically useless and their powers of analysis severely undermined.⁷ Surrounded by "the blackness of darkness" which pervades "that terrific, that unparalleled abyss" (pp. 54, 55), he is unable to see, and his sense of hearing is numbed by "a sustained and unintermittent roar, a low droning sound" (p. 57). Despite his anxious wish to orient himself spatially so as to estimate his boat's rate of progress, in the "intolerable" darkness he is without any effective means of doing so. Addled, he attempts by reasoning to form some definite notion of his situation, but his efforts are repetitive and inconclusive (pp. 54-56). He succumbs to boding fears and an "oppression of soul" (p. 57); he falls prey to suicidal impulses, but these are succeeded by a mood of calm readiness to face any emergency; he seeks to distract himself; at last he falls asleep, but he is disturbed by "troubled dreams in which . . . all the eventful scenes of the past . . . [are] intermingled in the wildest confusion" (p. 60). Like Arthur Gordon Pym, the most fully developed of Poe's neurotic narrators and a figure whose terrifying incarceration in the hold of the brig *Grampus* is comparable at a suspiciously high number of points to his own adventures in the "tremendous cavern",⁸ Adam More is by his own admission unable fully to control himself.

Curiously, however, in his account of his experiences More fails to convey the impression that almost intolerable strains actually have been placed upon what he describes as his fragile and beleaguered mental stability. The absence of a convincing atmosphere of intense stress from the portrayal of so manifestly traumatic a sequence of events as this is of course immediately noticeable, and as a topic for critical comment it is problematical in itself. In the present context it is particularly so, for the emotional aura in question is a characteristic feature in the body of horror fiction which De Mille has adopted as a composite paradigm for the scene. How, in short, are we to account for the divergence in effect between More's description of his trials in the dark cavern and the practice of Poe upon which it is modelled? In part at least, the relative flatness of More's narration may be ascribed to a deep disparity in characterization between him and a psychologically aberrant Poe hero such as Arthur Gordon Pym. At the very outset of *Pym*, that is, we are informed that the "enthusiastic temper, and gloomy, although glowing imagination" of its protagonist induce him to long for "terrible moments of suffering and despair", preferably to be savored in lands "unapproachable and unknown" (p.17). Pym's subsequent journey toward the South Pole, which he actively schemes to advance, is thus readily understandable as the expression of his perverse passion to explore the extreme limits of human experience. We are made aware that, like the deepest layers of his own consciousness, external nature in these remote regions is to him a mysterious, an appalling yet fascinating thing. Adam More, on the other hand, appears in general to be a stable, matter-of-fact, thoroughly conventional individual. De Mille portrays him as unusual only in the sense that he is placed in a succession of unlikely predicaments — from which, unlike Pym, he struggles with determination to escape. Because he ordinarily radiates so decided an air of ruddy normality, More's account of his own flamboyant mental reactions while passing through the underground cavern seems inconsistent with his character and smacks of over-protestation. Here and elsewhere in *A Strange Manuscript*, the "horrors" described by More in conventionally emphatic language simply have none of the deep psychological resonance they do in a work such as *Pym*. At times, indeed, they are almost funny. For example, while in the dark cavern More is stalked by a baleful sea-monster; but in his portrayal of the incident, this creature — which abruptly vanishes after making a very

brief appearance — conveys the impression almost of a lurid stage-prop, or some innocuous Disneyland wonder. At a few points the words *horror*, *horrible*, and *horrific* are employed with such insistence as very nearly to provoke in the reader a response diametrically opposite to the one which More presumably intends.⁹

What was De Mille's aim in causing Adam More to relate his trials in the ineffective manner he does? Was he attempting straightforwardly to duplicate the memorable effects achieved by Poe in his celebrated tales of terror? If so, a critical assessment of the effort springs immediately to mind: being devoid of sensitivity to that bleak mode of consciousness which Poe had denominated "the Gothic . . . of the *soul*",¹⁰ De Mille failed, and almost ludicrously so. However, in our present want of any carefully formulated notions about his aims for *A Strange Manuscript*, this tidy hypothesis must be regarded with great caution. To regard the novel, in part or as a whole, as an imitative work is arbitrarily to judge it according to a standard set by the work of Poe, and therefore not necessarily pertinent to the intentions of its author. An equally inviting but no less arbitrary procedure would be to account for the density of *Pym*-derived features in the early chapters by claiming that De Mille drew upon Poe's narrative merely as an expeditious means of transporting his own hero to the Antarctic, so as to get on with the "real business" of his book. It is possible, after all, that he conceived of More's voyage south as an integral component in the overall design of the work. The critical task before us is, taking due notice of his appropriations from the writings of Poe, Prescott, and Melville, to read De Mille on his own terms: to discover the ways in which he envisioned the material he adapted from the three figures as furthering his aims, and to evaluate his success in realizing those aims.

II

Fortunately, some of his preoccupations in *A Strange Manuscript* are recognizable at once, both in themselves and in contrast to those evident in the writings he draws upon. The contrasts in emphasis between the novel and its antecedents are of particular usefulness in this regard, for in addition to suggesting De Mille's intentions they bring into view one of the salient characteristics of his art: his great

resourcefulness as an adapter of used literary material.¹¹ More than once in the book he finds means, despite his quite different purposes, authoritatively to integrate major features of the earlier works into his own. Among his gleanings from Poe, the most noteworthy instance of this unusual creative technique is his virtual duplication of the manner in which black-white imagery is employed in *Pym* — the contexts in which it appears, the dialectical pattern with which it is identified, and the implied resolution to which it contributes — all the while relating it to subject-matter of another kind.

Poe utilizes the opposition of black and white as a motif subserving one of his central aims in *Pym*, that of implicit psychological revelation. Blackness and darkness are associated in the tormented mind of Arthur Gordon Pym with disorientation, terror, and the entire anarchic world of the subconscious which he regards with fearful fascination. In the course of his adventures, his fear and repulsion from all he associates with blackness repeatedly expresses itself, consistently enough, in the form of racial prejudice. To cite a single example, having recounted his near-victimization by the perfidious tribe of black savages — whom he had previously treated with almost contemptuous condescension — Pym denounces them passionately as “among the most barbarous, subtle, and bloodthirsty wretches that ever contaminated the face of the globe” (p.204). As a “white” American man living in the very deep south, he posits a self-serving opposition between his own race, which he clearly associates with rationality and characterizes by sophistication, good faith, and virtue, and the black tribesmen whom he identifies with the subconscious and represents as embodiments of savagery, bad faith, and evil.¹² Yet, taken as a whole, Pym’s narrative demonstrates that he harbors within himself the identical “black” moral qualities he ascribes to these and other “savages”, and that he is subject to the same powerful sub-rational impulses with which he identifies them and their behavior. The book suggests that, consciously or not, he projects onto others the aspects of his own identity which he finds it intolerable to acknowledge. We notice that the black people have fully as intense a fear of whiteness as Pym does of its opposite; and if Pym’s actions — selfish, deceitful, murderous, cannibalistic — may be taken to epitomize the moral nature of a “white” man, little wonder. *Pym* thus undercuts the moral antithesis which its central character purports to emblemize in the opposition of black and white. It implies that humanity is not

divisible into "races" identifiable with opposite poles of morality but is comprised of a single population in which consciously disciplined behavior and the destructive response to extra-rational forces of mind struggle continually for mastery.¹³

In *A Strange Manuscript* De Mille likewise develops a purported moral opposition between two peoples whose contrasting qualities are associated with the images of black and white. However, he reveals none of Poe's fascination for the contention within one individual between impulses to behavior associated with the dominance of various levels of mind. Instead, by implication he explores two radically differing social frameworks in terms of the opposed views of life and schemes of value which inform them. Shortly after Adam More emerges into sunlight from the subterranean cavern near the South Pole, he encounters a previously unknown race of men called the Kosekin. Upon being rescued by a group of these dark-skinned people, More notices with interest that they all betray severe discomfort when exposed to the rays of the sun. He soon learns that, owing to their uniformly weak eyes, they prefer during the long Antarctic day to inhabit gloomy caves and caverns. The annual night season is to them a period of release from the constrained mode of life they are at other times obliged to pursue; and to welcome its arrival these "People of Darkness", as the name *Kosekin* denotes in their language, participate each year in a solemn festival of celebration. Presently, under the tutelage of Almah, a young woman who like him has been swept by ocean currents to this uncharted land, Adam More discovers that among the Kosekin the love of darkness is accompanied by a fervent longing for death, as man's ultimate boon and blessing. Forced to grapple with the notion that death, which to him and Almah is "the King of Terrors", is known among the Kosekin as "the Lord of Joy" (p.99), the amazed More immediately brands their attitude "in opposition to nature itself" (p.104) — obviously associating "nature" with his own views. The epithet "children of light" (p.87), which he has earlier assigned to himself and Almah in token of their shared love of sunlight and antipathy to darkness, thus begins to take on a broader moral import. When he is informed that a ceremony of human sacrifice — to him a horrible barbarity — constitutes a part of what the Kosekin regard as a sublime religious observance, the opposition in his mind between himself and his obliging hosts grows more nearly absolute. But when at

last he learns that cannibalistic feasts form part of Kosekin customs, and that he and Almah are themselves destined, as a mark of unusual distinction, to be killed and eaten, More is not only horrified ("Oh horror, horror, horror! Oh, hideous abomination and deed without a name!" [p.223] is his immediate reaction), but he is also paralyzed with incomprehension. "We were both aliens here", he has come to realize, "in a nation of kind-hearted and most self-denying fiends; of men who were highly civilized, yet utterly wrong-headed and irreclaimable in their bloodthirsty cruelty" (p.113).

His sojourn among them having lengthened into months, More is sufficiently conversant with the civilization of the Kosekin to include in his narrative a broad resume of their beliefs and customs (pp.136-42). Yet he has never come truly to understand them, nor to regard them as anything but perverse. Continually aware of their simultaneous kindness to him and frank intention of killing and devouring him, he can only conceive of them as animated paradoxes — "amiable miscreants" (p.113). He is unshakable in his inherited code of values, never wavering from the "natural" attitudes he identifies with his own upbringing. Of course, the heavy suggestion of his given name notwithstanding, he is not at all a "natural" man but a thoroughly conventional representative of his culture, a kind of European Everyman. To this modern More, burdened as he is with the notion that his own assumptions and biases have universal validity, Kosekin civilization is no Utopia but rather a repugnant and unaccountable aberration. In his mind, the differences between himself and the Kosekin are epitomized by the oppositions between love of light and love of darkness, reverence for life and longing for death, the natural and the perverse: in short, white and black.

However, since the world of the Kosekin is admittedly "all a dark and dreadful mystery" (p.106) to More, we are not surprised to find De Mille suggesting in *A Strange Manuscript* that his protagonist's absolute distinctions between their culture and his own are short-sighted and subject to serious question. The value system underlying the customs of the Kosekin, the author implies, is distinctly similar if not identical to that of the outside world from which the Englishman has voyaged. For example, More notes with wonder that it is thought desirable among the Kosekin to occupy a *low* rank in the social hierarchy, so that an impoverished beggar is reckoned by them a fortunate man. He is

equally taken aback when he learns that the "kindnesses" forced upon him by almost all his hosts proceed from a spirited competition amongst them to divest themselves of as much of their worldly wealth as they can. He fails at this point to recognize that, under the appearance of charity and self-denial, his benefactors are in fact seeking to attain at his expense what they regard as the felicity of indigence. Although he gradually grows familiar with their ostensibly self-denying behavior and at last contrives shrewdly to turn it to his own account,¹⁴ More never manages to reflect effectively upon some of the assumptions which underlie it: the necessity of self-reliance, the importance of material wealth (or the lack of it), and the desirability of hard work and intense competition in singleminded pursuit of status. Because he is blinded by the belief that Kosekin civilization has nothing whatever in common with his own, he fails to make the unflattering comparisons between cultures which suggest themselves readily enough to the reader of his account. In light of More's evident obtuseness, we are led to suspect that his exposition of "unnatural" Kosekin beliefs and practices is intended to function in *A Strange Manuscript* as a satire-by-indirection on what De Mille regarded as the hypocritical, competitive, canting, materialistic, and status-ridden civilization of his own era. In fact, the author invites this interpretation in several ways. The persuasive speculations later in the novel that the Kosekin speak a language akin to Hebrew, and are thus "a Semitic people" related to other modern nations descended from the ancient Israelites, lend a typically fanciful support to the implied proposition that the two civilizations conceived by More to be fundamentally opposed are merely diverse expressions of shared Philistine values.¹⁵

In a manner which closely parallels Poe's in *Pym*, De Mille thus undermines the distinctions propounded by his narrator and conveyed through black-white imagery. Like Poe, he does not insist upon the inadequacy of these formulae but relies upon the acumen of the reader for perception of his authorial point of view. Unlike Poe, he relates his imagery to an implicit comparison between the outward accoutrements of two societies — the social hierarchies, the conventions of getting and spending, the laws and codes by which their people live from day to day. It would be difficult to conceive of a satiric format less stimulating than this to the imagination of the American writer. We have yet to relate a substantial proportion of the material derived from Poe to the

discernible aims of *A Strange Manuscript*, but from our analysis thus far it would appear that De Mille has drawn extensively upon the work of an author with whose interests and intentions his own do not share a great deal in common.

III

As a model for his portrayal of Adam More's entry into the land of the Kosekin, and of More's subsequent contrast between Kosekin civilization and that of the outside world, De Mille turned to Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* (1844).¹⁶ This magisterial narrative of the subjugation of the Aztec empire by Spanish forces under the command of Hernando Cortez recounts the progressive penetration into the dominions of an alien people by a protagonist who is explicitly identified with the Europe of his time. Apparently perceiving in the narrative pattern of the *History* a usable analogue to the work he had in mind, as he composed *A Strange Manuscript* De Mille adapted one of the central features in Prescott's portrayal of the Christian conquest of Mexico as an episode in a great drama of human progress. In general, he follows the historian in setting forth the religious practices of the alien civilization as typifying the moral gulf which separates it from the comparatively enlightened one represented by the European protagonist. More particularly, he describes the Kosekin as performing religious rites almost identical to those ascribed by Prescott to the Aztecs, and he also portrays them as conducting these observances in a starkly dramatic setting which practically duplicates the one described in the *History* as consecrated to the same purpose.

Near the outset of the *History*, defining the character of the magnificent empire which is shortly to be reduced to ruins through the bold enterprize of Cortez, Prescott discourses at some length about the religious beliefs of the Aztecs. In the following passage he offers a single instance of the role played in their religion by human sacrifices:

One of their most important festivals was that in honor of the god, Tezcatlipoca, whose rank was inferior only to that of the Supreme Being. . . . A year before the intended sacrifice, a captive, distinguished for his personal beauty, and without a blemish on his body, was selected to represent this deity. Certain tutors took charge of him, and instructed him how to perform his new part with becoming grace and dignity. He was arrayed in a splendid dress, regaled with incense and with a profusion of sweet-scented flowers. . . .

At length the fatal day of sacrifice arrived. The term of his short-lived glories was at an end. . . . One of the royal barges transported him across the lake to a temple which rose on its margin, about a league from the city. Hither the inhabitants of the capital flocked, to witness the consummation of the ceremony. As the sad procession wound up the sides of the pyramid, the unhappy victim threw away his gay chaplets of flowers, and broke in pieces the musical instruments with which he had solaced the hours of captivity. On the summit he was received by six priests, whose long and matted locks flowed disorderly over their sable robes, covered with hieroglyphic scrolls of mystic import. They led him to the sacrificial stone, a huge block of jasper, with its upper surface somewhat convex. On this the prisoner was stretched. Five priests secured his head and his limbs; while the sixth, clad in a scarlet mantle, emblematic of his bloody office, dexterously opened the breast of the wretched victim with a sharp razor of *itztli* — a volcanic substance hard as flint — and, inserting his hand in the wound, tore out the palpitating heart. (pp.46-47)

Immediately following this carefully paced and pictorialized account of a ritual murder, Prescott adds that the ceremony was succeeded by a “banquet . . . conducted with all the decorum of civilized life” upon the remains of the victim. He concedes that the Aztecs regarded the individual who was slain in this grisly ritual as enjoying “the most glorious death”, but he is frank to express his own opinion that the entire observance revealed the barbaric “fanaticism” of all those who participated in it. “Surely”, he remarks of the cannibalistic banquet, “never were refinement and the extreme of barbarism brought so closely in contact with each other!” (p.48).

In his ensuing account of the exploits of Cortez, Prescott repeatedly draws attention to the pyramidal *teocallis* atop whose heights the human sacrifices were performed in the Mexican capital.¹⁷ Owing to his preliminary explanation of their sacred purposes, these statuesque buildings, looming grandly above the structures around them, rapidly take on emblematic significance. They symbolize the corrupt moral life of the sophisticated yet fanatical civilization which is being invaded by Cortez and his band of Christian cavaliers. Once Prescott has recounted the capture and near-destruction of the city by the Spaniards, he surveys the scene of desolation in a verbal panorama, viewed as if from the top of a *teocalli*. This grand vision is poignant since it is the last in a series of descriptions of the once-prosperous capital, all presented as from similar vantage-points.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the melancholy aroused by the scene is mitigated by Prescott’s assurance, made early in the *History* and reiterated in various ways throughout, that “it was beneficently

ordered by Providence that the land should be delivered over to another race" which brought with it "the benign radiance of Christianity" (p.51). The almost miraculous victory of Cortez' vastly outnumbered troops over the Aztec armies was according to Prescott a stroke for the moral advancement of mankind. It was a triumph for the forces of enlightenment over those of barbarism.¹⁹

In a fundamental sense, therefore, the aim of the implied social comparisons in *A Strange Manuscript* must be distinguished from that of the contrasts between cultures in the *History*. Whereas Prescott insists upon the moral superiority of European civilization over that of the Aztecs, we have seen that De Mille casts grave doubt on Adam More's distinctions between Kosekin culture and that of his own upbringing. Yet De Mille was clearly not deterred by this difference in ideology from adapting elements of the historian's artistic strategy for portraying the scenes and events in the conquest of Mexico. As Adam More recounts his first glimpses of the Kosekin metropolis in which he subsequently takes up residence, he recurs four times within a single paragraph to the "pyramidal roofs" of certain "massive edifices" which dominate its skyline. At the conclusion of the passage, having by insistent repetition secured the reader's attention to these monolithic structures, he describes one of them in further detail: it is "shaped like a half pyramid, with three sides sloping, and the fourth perpendicular, flat on the top, which [is] approached by a flight of steps" (pp.68-69). Not long after his arrival, More is invited to witness a portion of his hosts' great ceremony celebrating the advent of darkness. This rite, he observes, is performed atop "the half-pyramid of which I have already spoken":

The Kohen [a Kosekin dignitary and an acquaintance of More] ascended the pyramid, and others followed. At the base there was a crowd of men, with emaciated forms and faces, and coarse, squalid attire, who looked like the most abject paupers, and seemed the lowest in the land. As the Kohen reached the summit there arose a strange sound — a mournful, plaintive chant, which seemed to be sung chiefly by the paupers at the base of the pyramid. . . . In the midst of this I saw the crowd parting asunder so as to make way for something; and through the passage thus formed I saw a number of youths in long robes, who advanced to the pyramid, singing as they went. Then they ascended the steps, two by two, still singing, and at length reached the summit, where they arranged themselves in order. There were thirty of them, and they . . . never ceased to sing, while the paupers below joined in the strain.

And now the sun was almost hidden, and there was only the faintest line from the upper edge of his disk perceptible over the icy mountaintops. The light was a softened twilight glow. . . . All this served only to heighten the effect of this striking scene; and as the light faded away, I looked with increasing curiosity upon the group at the top of the pyramid. Almah was silent. I half turned, and said something to her about the beauty of the view. She said nothing, but looked at me with such an expression that I was filled with amazement. I saw in her face something like a dreadful anticipation — something that spoke of coming evil. The feeling was communicated to me, and I turned my eyes back to the group on the pyramid with vague fears in my soul.

Those fears were but too well founded, for now the dread ceremony began. The Kohen drew his knife, and placed himself at the head of the stone table. One of the youths came forward, stepped upon it, and lay down on his back with his head towards the Kohen. The mournful chant still went on. Then the Kohen raised his knife and plunged it into the heart of the youth. (pp.108-09)

“Oh, horrible, horrible, thrice horrible spectacle!” (p.110) ejaculates More. It is clear that De Mille’s conception of the ceremony of sacrifice was profoundly influenced by his recollection of Prescott’s account of the analogous Aztec observance. Not only in the details of its setting and action, but in its stately pace and its careful attention to visual effects, the passage reveals its literary lineage with utter frankness. De Mille has seized upon Prescott’s central symbol of the “fanatical” Aztec religion as a dramatic rallying-point for his own work; and through the remainder of *A Strange Manuscript* the “pyramidal structures” emblemize Adam More’s confused sense that the Kosekin, though civilized, are savages.

At the climax of the novel, More and Almah are themselves led as intended victims up opposite sides of a towering pyramid. Having reached its “broad flat top”, they face each other across the “sacrificial stone” near which the chief Kosekin priest stands holding a “long, keen knife”. The glare of “a horrid death-hunger in his ravenous eyes”, the priest now turns to More and motions him to lie down, explaining that “on this stone . . . you are to get the blessing of death”. More, raising his rifle in warning, responds with a “fierce” but unintentionally paradoxical defiance: “ ‘I’ll die first!’ ” (pp.242-43).

IV

In one of the two major instances of his indebtedness in *A Strange Manuscript* to *Mardi* (1849),²⁰ Melville’s exuberant conglomerate of

imaginary travel, "romance", speculation, and socio-political satire, De Mille follows a pattern of assimilation which recalls his Poe-inspired portrayal of Adam More's horrific experiences in the dark cavern. He presents material which in several respects parallels that employed by the earlier writer with serious intention, but he lends it a quality verging onto the comic. In his second appropriation, he draws upon *Mardi* in a manner analogous to his use of the black-white imagery of *Pym* and the symbolic *teocallis* of Prescott's *History*. He neatly extracts a feature from the artistic design of Melville's novel and adapts it to his own somewhat different intentions. In the latter instance, however, a much closer affinity in aims is apparent between *A Strange Manuscript* and the antecedent work than can be discerned between De Mille's novel and either *Pym* or the *History*.

The plots of *Mardi* and *A Strange Manuscript* include romantic complications strikingly similar in outline, each consisting of a triangular relationship in which the protagonist is confronted with a choice between two women who are portrayed as schematically diverse in their personal attributes. The heroines of *A Strange Manuscript* are unmistakably the fictive descendants, through the long line of nineteenth-century Light and Dark Ladies, from Rowena and Rebecca in Scott's *Ivanhoe*.²¹ However, because they and their actions are represented by De Mille in distinctive and extra-traditional ways — indicated below by asterisks — which duplicate those pertaining to Melville's heroines in *Mardi*, their more immediate lineage of conception seems traceable, at least in part, to that novel. Like Taji, the narrator-protagonist of *Mardi*, Adam More makes the acquaintance of a pale, delicate maiden with whom, despite an initial awkwardness caused by the strange language she speaks, *he immediately senses an affinity* and soon falls in love. Like Yillah, the Light Lady who is Taji's loved one, More's Almah has passed her childhood in a dimly-remembered land across the sea, *but she is now a "sacred hostage" (p.104) among an alien race,* and a destined sacrifice to their gods.*²² As her name suggests, Almah becomes to More virtually a part of his soul — a being "more precious [to him] than all the world" (p.121) besides. Similarly, the pensive Yillah gazes into the eyes of her Taji "like some pure spirit looking down into [his] soul" (p.152), and he identifies with her "all things desirable and delightful" (p.145). Passive, dependent, and melancholy, these two maidens provide Taji and Adam More with

reasons for being and spurs to decisive action. Their opposite numbers, the Dark Ladies of the novels, are portrayed in parallel fashion as well. Like Hautia, her counterpart in *Mardi*, the beautiful Layelah in *A Strange Manuscript* is in frank amorous pursuit of the protagonist. This "Dark Maiden" (p.170), as De Mille once terms her, is tall, projects an "air of command" (p.165), and has "rich, dark, and luxuriant" hair and sensuous dark eyes (p.164). Like Hautia, she is of a passionate nature and exerts a powerful sensual attraction. Both women attempt persistently to win over their men from their rivals, and by their machinations both do manage for a time to separate the protagonists from the Light Ladies.*They denounce the other women with scorn as, in the words of Layelah, "cold, dull, sad" (p.205).* Yet More, like Taji, is proof against all the allurements of his Dark Lady; he remains fixed in his devotion to Almah.²³

In *Mardi*, Melville causes the relationships between Taji and the Light and Dark Ladies to contribute to a searching examination of his male protagonist as a moral being. Each of the women in Taji's life has for him a profound and mysterious identification with the roots of his personality. In her abstraction from the world, the childlike Yillah embodies a state of innocence within himself which, once he is separated from her, he becomes frantic to re-attain. On the other hand, he is pursued unremittingly by Hautia, who looks upon him with a "fathomless" (p.646) eye "forever prying into [his] soul" (p.186) to a depth as great as the haunting gaze of Yillah. Hautia — devious, unprincipled, and predatory — embodies for Taji all the qualities of moral decadence which he perceives but is unwilling to acknowledge in himself. In this sense his quest after the lost Yillah, followed "over an endless sea" (p.654) by Hautia and her weird messengers, resolves itself into a kind of interior narrative, an adventure in what he calls "the world of mind" (p.557). *Mardi* portrays the attempt of its hero to divorce himself from the corrupt elements in his personality and to re-possess the receding phantom of his innocence.²⁴

This dimension of Melville's novel, so reminiscent of the correlated concerns with psychology and morality which we have traced in *Pym*, is utterly absent from the portrayal in *A Strange Manuscript* of the relationships between More, Almah, and Layelah. More's attitude toward Almah is that of a conventional romantic lover: he idolizes her, and he longs to possess her in marriage. "Could I endure life here

without her sweet companionship?" (p.121) he asks. Whereas in *Mardi* the imperious Hautia is sinister and spellbinding, her demeanor suggesting some pre-Beardsleyan queen, Layelah is by contrast rather girlish. She is not a deeply perverse moral agent, and while her physical advances toward More do necessitate his making heroic efforts at self-control, they are not portrayed as posing momentous threats to his essential nature. More than once, in fact, they are made the occasions of light comedy.²⁵ Adam More is simply a character who happens to be admired by a Light Lady and, embarrassingly, a Dark one as well. Whatever else it may be, *A Strange Manuscript* is not a novel in which "the world of mind" is explored.

The second major manifestation in *A Strange Manuscript* of De Mille's creative response to *Mardi* is a heterogeneous set of characters closely analogous to the knot of companion-commentators which Melville associates with Taji during that character's quest after his lost Yillah.²⁶ Not only these subordinate characters themselves, but more importantly the wide-ranging effects which De Mille realizes through the scenes dominated by them, are comparable in several ways to those in Melville's novel. Shortly after the protagonist of *Mardi* becomes aware that Yillah has mysteriously been spirited away from him, he is joined by four individuals, each of whom professes an interest in the success of the sea-voyage he intends to make in pursuit of her. They are Media, a tyrannical king and self-proclaimed demigod; Yoomy, a youthful poet; Mohi, an aged antiquarian and historiographer; and Babbalanja, a troubled philosopher. In the chapters that follow, each of these characters reveals some unsatisfied desire peculiar to his way of life and habits of thought which accounts for his presence on the voyage, and each comments from his distinctive point of view upon the developing action and such other topics as happen to interest him. The diverse opinions expressed by these representatives of various spheres of human activity give rise to heated debates amongst them. In a series of amusing wrangles, such as the one between the crusty Mohi and the dreamy man of sensibility, Yoomy (pp.280-84), Melville puts the viewpoint of each character through its paces, indicating its strengths and weaknesses both in itself and in relation to those advanced by the other members of Taji's entourage. The strenuous play of ideas thus dramatized in the book constitutes an exhilarating if challenging entertainment in its own right, but it serves as well to enforce Melville's

underlying thesis in *Mardi* that the truths perceptible to the human mind are multiple, overlapping, and often even conflicting, while absolute truth, the aim of all intellectual discipline, is an elusive and finally ungraspable phantom. Rather than distracting from the narrative of Taji's quest, the conversations between his fellow travellers complement it by adding an array of related quests and a multi-faceted commentary on man's search for truth.

The characters in *A Strange Manuscript* who are analogous to the four companions of Taji appear as principals in the fable devised by De Mille as a frame to the narrative of Adam More. The fable is as follows:

four Englishmen, becalmed in the vicinity of the Canary Islands while on a pleasure cruise aboard the yacht *Falcon*, discover by chance a large copper cylinder floating near them. Retrieving it and prying it open, they discover inside the cylinder a manuscript written in English on some unusual vegetable material, apparently papyrus. Then, to pass the time of day, each of the four gentlemen reads aloud a portion of the communication – the narrative of Adam More – and when he completes his stint as reader, they all join in discussion of More and his experiences. These lively exchanges elicit a variety of approaches to the curious subject-matter of the manuscript. The conversants are Lord Featherstone, the able but rather languid owner of the yacht; Dr. Congreve, “a middle-aged man” (p.70), knowledgeable in paleontology, the history of exploration, and all the physical sciences; Noel Oxenden, “late of Trinity College, Cambridge” (p.70), a philologist – expert as well in philosophy and historical anthropology; and Otto Melick, a young *litterateur* from London. Like Melville's, De Mille's assemblage of commentators bulks large with men of volubility and intellect but includes one high-born member – Media, Featherstone – who professes to be unmoved alike by the enthusiasms and the anxieties of his companions.

In the chapters of *A Strange Manuscript* given over to discussions amongst these four characters – Chapters 1, 7, 17, 26, and 31 – De Mille achieves more than a mere series of diversions from the fantastical narrative of Adam More. As punctuations of the action the conversations do provide temporary breaks in the brisk pace of More's account, but they complement the manuscript in a more substantial way. The written record of More's adventures and observations forms a common body of material to which the gentlemen aboard the *Falcon* all respond according to their own areas of expertise. By dramatizing the play of their acute minds over the successive portions of the manuscript, De Mille adds to that basic account a series of ingenious if at times outlandish exercises in interpretation of it. For example, with irrepressible enthusiasm Dr. Congreve compares More's geographical

observations to those in James Clarke Ross' recently published account of his exploring expedition to the Antarctic (pp.73-75, 78);²⁷ at another point he gravely identifies some of the unusual animals encountered and described by More as species previously supposed extinct — *Dinornis Gigantea*, *Plesiosaurus*, and *Iguanadon*, to name a few (pp.145-47). Oxenden invokes Grimm's Law laboriously to demonstrate the relationship of the Kosekin language to ancient Hebrew (pp.150-51, 220-21), and later he discusses the Kosekin reverence for death in the context of sentiments expressed throughout history by "the intelligent Hindoos, the Chinese, and Japanese, with many other nations" (p.224) concerning the vanity of earthly existence. Melick regards the manuscript from a literary point of view, denouncing its prose style as "detestable" but praising its overall intention as (he affirms) "a satire against the restlessness of humanity" (pp.215, 216). Finally, Lord Featherstone looks on with droll indulgence as his friends lavish their learning, sensibility, and ingenuity on the enigmatic object of their attention. It is he who most often makes explicit the comic overtones in these scenes portraying the earnest deployment and operation of heavy intellectual equipment.

The conversations between the four characters aboard the *Falcon* exert a pervasive effect upon our reading of *A Strange Manuscript*. The principle is early established that, no matter how bizarre and implausible More's reports of his experiences may at first appear, by reference to one area or another of modern knowledge they may presently be accounted for and thereby intellectually domesticated.²⁸ The myriad potential patterns of relationship between More's narrative and the analyses of it by these learned individuals arouse in the reader a special variety of expectant attention. Virtually every salient detail in More's account is perceived to have its place, not only as a component of his own communication, but also as a potential element in some scheme of interpretation eventually to be hit upon and then debated by Featherstone's companions. The character of the work as in part a narrative-cum-puzzle, an extended intellectual game, rapidly becomes apparent. The book invites one, in fact, to undertake a scrutiny of More's manuscript identical in aim to that being performed by the auditors aboard the *Falcon*. It affords the reader an opportunity to set aside his role as the passive peruser of a told "story" and to take up the more enterprising one as a kind of detective, alert for clues which may

enable him to solve at least some of the problems of interpretation and identification posed by the manuscript.²⁹

In setting forth a range of intellectual approaches to the primary subject-matter of their respective works, Melville and De Mille both demonstrate the integrity of the points of view represented by their four commentators while delimiting the authority of each in relation to the others. Despite the abstruseness or intrinsic difficulty of the material presented in the scenes given over to these subsidiary figures, both authors manage not only to draw out the comic potential of the conversations in which that material is explored but also to portray the process of exploration as itself an integral element in their books. Both, that is, devise effective means of relating the scenes dominated by their commenting characters to problems embodied in the central lines of narrative. *Mardi* and *A Strange Manuscript* are of course in many respects radically different books. Nonetheless, in their learnedness, their lavish heterogeneity, their wittiness, and their very difficulty they do suggest an affinity between their authors which accounts in some measure for the similar purposes Melville and De Mille have caused the commenting characters to serve. The creators of *Mardi* and *A Strange Manuscript* evidently conceived of literary entertainment in a rather special way. Reading was to them an amusement, but it was not necessarily a frivolous activity compatible with intellectual quiescence. Potentially at least, it was a strenuous exercise, a challenging interaction between author and reader requiring of the latter extensive preparation and careful attention; and yielding up, if not ultimate truth, or a conundrum definitively solved,³⁰ then as a consolation the pleasurable sense of human life having been viewed with informed and discriminating intelligence.

V

Our study seems thus far to establish that, by and large, De Mille has not been inhibited in *A Strange Manuscript* by the examples of his American "sources" but with deft authority has subordinated material drawn from the antecedent works to designs of his own. His skillful adaptations of the black-white dialectic of *Pym*, the symbolic architecture of the *History*, and the four commentators of *Mardi* afford strong support for this summary view. What, however, are we to say of the

derivative passages in the novel — some of them standing out rather starkly as “borrowed” — which we have not yet been able to perceive as integrated into the complex of De Mille’s intentions? From Poe, the *Pym*-derived details in the account of More’s sea-journey southward and the subsequent description of the “horrors” he experiences in the underground cavern are the primary examples of this problematical material. From Melville, the love-relation of More to the Light and Dark Ladies is the obvious case in point. Drawing now upon the results of our comparative analyses and on supplementary evidence concerning De Mille’s literary opinions and predilections, we shall attempt to bring into focus the contributions which he envisioned these readily traceable instances of his indebtedness as making to his book.

Recognition of the radical eclecticism of *A Strange Manuscript* was itself, I suggest, a significant component of the entertainment he designed the novel to afford. He appears to have conceived of the work as in part what we might now call a Nabokovian amusement: a succession of more or less exact literary echoes, perceivable only to the fit audience who might be familiar with the range of works thus alluded to, but providing for those persons a series of pleasant recognitions. Thus, just as every detail in the narrative of Adam More is potentially an element in some feat of analysis by one of its four auditors aboard the *Falcon*, so it stands as a possible clue to some aspect of the book’s motley literary ancestry. In view of the several ways in which, during his career, De Mille revealed an inclination to devise intellectual puzzles as determinants of literary form and components of literary entertainment,³¹ it is surely not surprising that one of his fictional games should be played in this particular manner. The portions of the text derived from the works of earlier writers are no doubt the most easily identifiable of his allusive clues — it is actually difficult for a suitably informed reader to peruse the initial segment of More’s narrative and not be reminded again and again of *Pym* — but they may not be the only hints of their kind. Why, for example, is it so carefully specified in the first sentence of the novel that the cylinder containing More’s narrative was discovered and read “as far back as February 15, 1850” (p.19)? Perhaps, indeed, for no good reason. On the other hand, we may note in passing that in 1850 Prescott and Melville were both at the acme of their considerable popularity, and that Poe, who had died one year before, was then at the height of his own posthumous notoriety.

Again, what are we to think of Otto Melick's unelaborated charge that the author of the strange manuscript is "a gross plagiarist" (p.217), or of the similarity between the names *Melick*, *Melville*, and *De Mille*? To the reader capable of recognizing the extent of De Mille's indebtedness to Poe, Prescott, and Melville, otherwise insignificant details such as these may well have the force of broad hints.

De Mille appears to have made literary capital of the unconcealed eclecticism of *A Strange Manuscript* in a second way, by mocking certain vulnerable features of the very works he was drawing upon. We have noticed his tendency to accentuate the latently comic aspects of derived material by divesting it of its intrinsic appropriateness in the work from which he has adapted it, thus isolating its peculiar qualities of style and tone. This is, of course, precisely the technique of the parodist; and according to the informed testimony of Archibald MacMechan and others, it is a technique entirely characteristic of De Mille, who as both man and writer was throughout his career an inveterate mimic. "Yielding half in joke to a public taste, not perhaps of the highest order", as MacMechan delicately put it, "the author did not condescend unduly". While in his published works he adopted the outlines of "sensationalist stories of the wildest kind, abounding in impossible adventures", he took care to preserve "a distinguished air . . . bespeaking the gentleman and scholar".³² In light of this suggestive commentary by MacMechan, the passages in *A Strange Manuscript* which some might deplore as flat imitations of Poe or Melville, and the unspecified scenes which Otto Melick dismisses as revealing "the worst vices of the sensational school" (p.217), are perhaps more properly to be read as send-ups of, respectively, the monotonous trappings of horror fiction, the ubiquitousness of Light and Dark Ladies, and the melodramatic excesses of popular romances. It is quite true that what appear to be the parodic passages in the novel do not convey an obtrusive impression of having been conceived for an exclusively comic purpose. For example, when at one unhappy moment the tearful Almah professes to Adam More that she would willingly die to save his life, More presses her closer in his arms and tremulously replies: " 'Oh, Almah, I would die to save you.' " This brief exchange is natural enough given its intensely melodramatic context, in which the two young lovers believe themselves about to be separated forever through the agency of a group of "nightmare hags" (p.237) surrounding

them.³³ Formulaic and hackneyed though the entire scene may be, De Mille is careful not to draw attention to its conventional mawkishness with such insistence as altogether to preclude its being taken seriously. Here and elsewhere, in a triumph of artistic tact he manages to suggest the traditions of literary gimcrackery which lie behind the narrative of Adam More without rendering More's account an absurdity in itself.

Archibald MacMechan specified "facility" as the fundamental distinguishing characteristic of De Mille's literary *oeuvre*, but he wisely dissociated *A Strange Manuscript* from that generalization, referring to it as the author's "most careful novel".³⁴ Our study of the work suggests that its essential qualities are not facility but economy and poise. In its skillful interplay between points of view, its nice balance between gravity and humor, its just perceptible undercurrents of satiric and parodic suggestion, and its neat adaptation of borrowed means to De Mille's own ends, *A Strange Manuscript* is the production of a scrupulous and sophisticated writer. The book is a generic non-descript, a pastiche of fantastic adventure, implicit social satire, intellectual puzzles, and parody. Frankly derivative, heterogeneous in content and style, it is an extended professorial play, a learned amusement. And on these modest but unique terms, it is eminently successful.

De Mille's use of the works of the three American writers we have noticed constitutes of course only a part of his achievement in *A Strange Manuscript*. Nevertheless, our analysis of the work from these varied points of view has afforded us a clarified perception of his aims in writing it and an enhanced awareness of his resourceful skill in realizing those aims. The novel thus stands sharply defined as an original production, traceable to elements of literary tradition yet bearing the stamp of its author's individual talent. The stature of De Mille as a Canadian literary artist is confirmed, not compromised, by the character of his indebtedness to Poe, Prescott, and Melville.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 "De Mille, the Man and the Writer," *Canadian Magazine*, 27 (September 1906), 404-16. MacMechan included a condensed version of his discussion in *Headwaters of Canadian Literature* (Toronto, 1924), pp.46-50. In *Canadian Bookman*, 4 (April 1922), 125-26, he gave a brief account of his attempt years before to compile a full-length biography of De Mille. For an ample supplement to MacMechan's recollections, see A. R. Bevan, "James De Mille and Archibald MacMechan", *Dalhousie Review*, 36 (Autumn 1955), [201-15].

2 MacMechan, "De Mille", pp. 406, 409, 414; see also *Headwaters*, pp. 48-49. On the other hand, MacMechan claimed that De Mille's *The Dodge Club; or, Italy in 1859* (New York, 1869), a comic narrative of fictional travels which had first appeared in *Harper's Magazine* during 1868, "struck the vein of comic humor which Mark Twain has mined with such profit in *The Innocents Abroad*" ("De Mille", p. 414). However, since *The Innocents Abroad* (New York, 1869) was based upon a series of articles published in the San Francisco *Alta California* and other newspapers during 1867, it is unlikely that Twain was influenced in that work by the example of De Mille.

3 *A Strange Manuscript* was first published anonymously in *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization*, 32, nos. 1620-1638 (January 7-May 12, 1888). In the same year it appeared as a volume both in the United States (New York: Harper and Brothers) and in England (London: Chatto and Windus). A second American edition was published by the Harpers in 1889 (Franklin Square Library, no. 639), and a third in 1900; a second English edition was published by Chatto and Windus in 1894. The first Canadian edition of the novel appeared in 1910 (Toronto: Macmillan). *A Strange Manuscript* has been reprinted, with an introduction by R. E. Watters, as no. 68 in the New Canadian Library series (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969). Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent citations of the novel refer to this most recent, most readily available edition. The page-numbers of quoted passages are specified parenthetically in the text.

In the slim body of critical commentary thus far accumulated about De Mille, *A Strange Manuscript* has without exception been singled out as his most estimable, if not indeed his only significant work of fiction. Besides the contributions by MacMechan mentioned in note 1 above, see R. W. Douglas, "James De Mille", *Canadian Bookman*, 4 (January 1922), 39-44; Lawrence J. Burpee, "Who's Who in Canadian Literature[:] James De Mille", *Canadian Bookman*, 8 (July 1926), 203-06; Fred Cogswell, "Literary Activity in the Maritimes, 1815-1880," in *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck (Toronto, 1965), pp. 111-14; R. E. Watters, "Introduction" to *A Strange Manuscript*, pp. vii-xviii; [George Woodcock], "An Absence of Utopias", *Canadian Literature*, 42 (Autumn 1969), 3-5; and Crawford Kilian, "The Cheerful Inferno of James De Mille", *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, 1, no. 3 (Fall 1972), 61-67. A consensus exists that *A Strange Manuscript* is a derivative work. The trends thus far have been to consider it in relation to contemporary utopian fiction (MacMechan, Woodcock), to popular romances and narratives of adventure (Cogswell), and to major monuments of satire such as More's *Utopia* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (Douglas, Watters, Kilian).

4 For example, it will immediately be clear to any reader familiar with Poe's "The Gold-Bug" that, in devising the legendary background to a boy's adventure novel entitled *The Treasure of the Seas* (New York, 1872), De Mille has simply scrambled some of the most distinctive external paraphernalia of the earlier work — including a lavish treasure treacherously hidden on a coastal island by Captain Kidd; a discoverer of the booty who climbs out onto a bough of a conspicuous oak tree in the course of his search for it; a shuffling, language-fracturing old negro; a document written in cipher; and other details. See *Treasure*, pp. 46-48, 81-85, 88.

In *The Cryptogram* (New York, 1871), a mystery novel, De Mille reveals an interest in the rigorous methods of analysis dramatized by Poe in his tales of ratiocination. He duplicates a central feature of "The Gold-Bug" by recounting the discovery of a secret message written in cipher, then causing one of his characters laboriously to explain the method by which the document is decoded. In the same work he presents, precisely in the manner of Poe's "The Mystery of Marie Roget", a succession of fictive newspaper clippings and personal papers which, with other evidence such as the secret message, enable the central riddle of the plot progressively to be laid bare and solved. See *Cryptogram*, pp. 27, 31, 54-55, 63, 250.

De Mille's familiarity with the poetry of Poe is plainly evident in his posthumous poem, edited by Archibald MacMechan, *Behind the Veil* (Halifax, 1893). For example, his initial description of its protagonist, who "on that night of all the years" stands alone on "a headland hoar and riven", longing for "the Loved and for the Lost" and wandering in mind "where no mortal e'er had crossed" (p.4) is virtually an amalgam of phrases from some of Poe's best-known lyrics, viz.: "The Sleeper", "A Dream Within a Dream", "Ulalume", and "The Raven". In his introduction to *Behind the Veil*, MacMechan accurately points out the similarity between its elaborate stanzaic structure and that of "The Raven" — a stanza of which poem, it may also be noted, appears in *The Cryptogram* (p.87). In "A Critical Biography of James De Mille" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1968), pp.

- 103-04, Douglas E. MacLeod has argued that a stanza of a poem published in *The Dodge Club* ("A Nightmare", pp. 30-31) owes its inspiration to Poe's "MS. Found in a Bottle".
- 5 Citations of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* refer to *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. James A. Harrison (New York, 1902), III, 1-245. The page-numbers of passages quoted from *Pym* are specified parenthetically in the text. The relationship between *A Strange Manuscript* and *Pym* has previously been noticed by James O. Bailey in *Pilgrims Through Space and Time* (New York, 1947), pp. 64-65; see also MacLeod, "A Critical Biography".
 - 6 At this point, De Mille makes explicit what Poe merely dramatizes in the concluding pages of *Pym*: that is, the notorious theory of "holes at the poles" promulgated chiefly by John Cleves Symmes, Jr. (c. 1760-1829). Adam More comments to his companion: "I've heard some old yarn of a vast opening at each of the poles, or one of them, into which the waters of the ocean pour" (p.40). Shortly afterward he expresses his belief that the ocean current drawing them southward "can have but one ending — there may be an opening at the South Pole, or a whirlpool like the Maelstrom" (p.41).
 - 7 For examples, see "MS. Found in a Bottle", "A Descent into the Maelstrom", "The Pit and the Pendulum", "The Premature Burial", and *Pym*. While close verbal parallels to the text of *A Strange Manuscript* may be isolated in each of these works, it would appear that in fashioning the passage De Mille drew upon a kind of assimilated awareness of Poe's manner as a fictionist rather than simply "borrowing" phrases from individual tales.
 - 8 In addition to their being isolated in total darkness, Pym and More undergo experiences which include the following points of similarity: conscious and unsuccessful attempt to collect thoughts (*Pym*, pp. 29, 33; *A Strange Manuscript*, p. 54); mind weakened by horrors already sustained and overwhelmed by despair (pp.37, 42; p.55); attention focused upon the fitful gleam of a distant light (p.36; p.55); intention of striking a match in order to orient self (p.38; p.57); perception of a hostile creature in close proximity, whose pantings can be heard (pp.39, 43; p.58); emphasis on the fearful eyes of this creature (pp.43, 44; p.58); reckless sentiment of readiness for any challenge (p.42; p.59); lapse into sleep (pp.42-43; p.59); troubled dreams in which recent events assume new forms and arrangement (p.28; p.60). Crawford Kilian has noted ("Cheerful Inferno", p.63) that the biblical phrase "the blackness of darkness" (Jude 13) occurs both in *Pym* (p.205) and in *A Strange Manuscript* (p.54). On that slim basis, he tentatively suggests that De Mille may have "conceived" his novel as a result of reading *Pym*.
 - 9 See, for example, *A Strange Manuscript*, pp. 91-92, 96-98, 118, 125-26, 230.
 - 10 "Preface", *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1840), I, xii.
 - 11 Although this aspect of De Mille's habits has not yet been explored in any detail, it will constitute a fruitful topic for further study. His indebtedness in *The Lady of the Ice* (New York, 1870), pp. 17-27, to James Fenimore Cooper's memorable portrayal in *Satanstoe* (1845), of the breakup of the ice in the Hudson River may be instanced as a striking case in point.
 - 12 For a suggestive discussion of the interrelated psychological and sociological overtones of the black-white imagery in *Pym*, see Harry Levin, *The Power of Blackness* (New York, 1958), pp. 120-24.
 - 13 That the fundamental human condition is one of interrelated civility and savagery, the latter concealed beneath a benign exterior, is suggested in *Pym* chiefly by the motif of masks (pp.20-21, 87-92, 110-12, 117-18) and by Pym's discussion (pp.153-57) of the curious habits of the pacific penguins and the sanguinary albatrosses which annually nest together in uneasy harmony. See Joel Porte, *The Romance in America* (Middletown, Conn., 1969), pp. 84-94.
 - 14 See *A Strange Manuscript*, pp. 247-49.
 - 15 The speculations about the language of the Kosekin are prefaced by the ironic remark of a character who claims to be able to "show clearly that these men . . . must belong to a stock that is nearly related to our own, or, at least, that they belong to a race of men with whom we are all very familiar" (p.149). The reflexive satire of *A Strange Manuscript* is strongly suggested by Adam More's summary of Kosekin culture, wherein he couches his statements in specialized language familiar to his readers as applying to their own society. For example: "The contest between capital and labor rages, but the conditions are reversed; for the grumbling capitalist complains that the laborer will not take as much pay as he ought to, while the laborer thinks the capitalist too persistent in his efforts to force money upon him" (p.138). Conversely, as R.E. Watters has pointed out ("Introduction", p.xv), the

- Kosekin are themselves addicted to a species of "pious cant" identical to that spoken by religious hypocrites in the English-speaking world. The essential kinship between the Kosekin world and that of More is suggested late in the novel when the assertion is made that More's entire narrative is a satire on "humanity" (p.215) at large.
- 16 Citations of the *History* refer to *History of the Conquest of Mexico and History of the Conquest of Peru* (New York, 1936). Page-numbers of passages quoted from the *History* are specified parenthetically in the text.
 - 17 See *History*, pp. 263-64, 272, 295, 332-38, 347, 367-68, 424-27, 444, 450, 520, 541, 562, 581-82, 593-96.
 - 18 See *History*, pp. 595-96; see also pp. 286-87, 496, 541-42.
 - 19 The relationship between Prescott's ideological bias and his artistic strategy in the *History* has been analyzed by David Levin in *History as Romantic Art* (Stanford, 1959), pp. [163]-85.
 - 20 *Mardi: And a Voyage Thither*, ed. Harrison Hayford, Herschel Parker, and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston and Chicago, 1970). Page-numbers of passages quoted from *Mardi* are specified parenthetically in the text.
 - 21 The tradition of the Light and Dark Ladies in nineteenth-century fiction has been authoritatively summarized by Perry Miller in "The Romance and the Novel", *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 241-78. The specifically literary conventionality of Almah's appearance and manner is suggested by More's observation that upon first seeing her he was reminded of women "whose portraits I had seen in annuals and illustrated books" (p.82). The Light-Dark dichotomy between the heroines of *A Strange Manuscript* was seized upon by Gilbert Gaul as a keynote in his illustrations of the novel for *Harper's Weekly*; see especially no. 1625 (February 11, 1888), 93, and no. 1629 (March 10, 1888), 165. The Gaul illustrations were included in the Harper editions of the novel published in 1888 and 1900 and in the Chatto and Windus edition of 1888.
 - 22 See *Mardi*, pp. 136, 137, 145, 157; *A Strange Manuscript*, pp. 81, 116, 126.
 - 23 See *Mardi*, pp. 536, 537, 539. Layelah of course manages to effect only a temporary separation between More and Almah (Chapters 24-25, 28-29), whereas at the close of *Mardi* its protagonist is still in search of Yillah.
 - 24 In *An Artist in the Rigging: The Early Work of Herman Melville* (Athens, Georgia, 1972), pp. 105-30, William P. Dillingham offers a penetrating discussion of *Mardi* as in part an interior narrative.
 - 25 See, for example, *A Strange Manuscript*, pp. 172-77, 206-07.
 - 26 R. E. Watters alludes to *Mardi* in his discussion of De Mille's commenting characters, noting that in each novel the subordinate figures "provide a kind of Greek chorus to the main narrative" ("Introduction", p.x).
 - 27 Ross (1800-1862) published in 1847 a two-volume work entitled *A Voyage of Discovery and Research in the Southern and Antarctic Regions During the Years 1839-1843* (London: John Murray).
 - 28 The skeptical Melick makes a similar point in the first of the commentaries on More's manuscript: "Well," he says, "there is no theory, however wild and fantastic, which some man of science will not be ready to support and fortify by endless arguments, all of the most plausible kind" (p.79). See also *A Strange Manuscript*, p.225.
 - 29 *A Strange Manuscript* invites one to adopt not only the role of detective, but in addition that of judge. The reader is placed in a position as potential evaluator of the several interpretations of More's narrative put forward by Featherstone and his companions.
 - 30 The question most consistently and heatedly debated by Featherstone, Congreve, Oxenden, and Melick is whether More's narrative is in fact a hoax. At the conclusion of the novel, this question remains unanswered.
 - 31 De Mille's use of encoded documents as factors in the unfolding of his plots, commented upon in note 4 above, is only one indication of his tendency to frame his tales as exercises in intricate analysis. The classic instance of De Mille's ability to devise narratives posing challenges to one's analytical powers is *Cord and Creese* (New York, 1869). In that novel he sets forth a labyrinthine plot involving mistaken identities, assumed names, and multiple clusters of characters, some of whom have at various times come in contact with each other — knowingly or unknowingly; and then, in the manner of Wilkie Collins, he causes his tale to move forward with the minute precision of an elaborate machine. The reader is challenged not only to extrapolate forward in the narrative to predict its resolution, but also to keep straight in his mind the myriad incidents, characters, and configurations of

motive of which he has already been informed. As in *Cord and Creese*, the final chapters of De Mille's published works are frequently given over to providing the solutions to problems which have been spelled out in their earlier pages. In *The Lady of the Ice*, for example, the brief summary at the head of the concluding chapter reads, in part: "A general understanding all round, and a universal explanation of numerous puzzles" (p.139). See also *The Cryptogram*, pp. 251-56.

- 32 MacMechan, "De Mille", p. 414. See also Bevan, "De Mille and MacMechan", pp. 202, 205.
- 33 At this point, as if to emphasize the hackneyed components of the scene, De Mille causes More to set down a *bravura* string of stale epithets describing the "nightmare hags": "The 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" (p.237).
- 34 MacMechan, "De Mille", p. 413.