

THE SEA VOYAGES OF EDGAR ALLAN POE

by

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ABSTRACT

The sea tales of Edgar Allan Poe--"MS Found in a Bottle", The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and "A Descent into the Maelstrom"--form an interesting group that has often been overlooked. Together they deal with the problem of the fragmented personality, a theme that lay at the heart of many of Poe's tales. The sea is the arena in which the fundamental struggle against psychic division takes place. In testing a man to his limits, the sea also reveals new possibilities and new knowledge.

Poe was a literary sailor coming to the sea not as an experienced hand as Melville and Conrad do, but rather in a symbolic way as the sea and sea experience had come down through the ages. The sea and sea voyage were potent and traditional symbols in literature. Poe approached this symbolic heritage from the view point of his time and place--as a nineteenth century American and Romantic.

The sea permeates the "MS Found in a Bottle", The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, and "A Descent into the Maelstrom". The loneliness and isolation of the sailor amidst the vast ocean symbolize the alienation of man in the universe and within a divided personality. But the triumph that the sea holds out to the man who can grasp it is an equally fundamental aspect of these tales, and helps to set this group apart from those other tales which explore this breakdown of personality from another angle--such as "The Fall of the House of Usher". Each of Poe's sailors comes to an understanding of his experience and lives and acts upon that new found knowledge, and that knowledge is found in the ebb and flow of the ocean's vast currents.

Each of Poe's sailors is dominated by one facet of his personality.

Other concerns are abandoned as that one faculty is pushed to its limits. But just as the ship at sea is a world unto itself and an able captain a master of diverse forces, so also do Poe's mariners seek triumph, salvation, and knowledge in the integration of their personalities. In realizing the limitations of the narrowness that dominates their worldview, they see possibilities for new achievement and understanding in the widening of the angle of perception. Poe's mariners grow from that moment of perception. They come to see the interdependence of their separate faculties reflected in the interdependence in the world of nature. In surrendering to the terror and beauty of nature they find themselves anew. They come to appreciate the community that exists among men, and each is at pains to share his new found knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

When on that shivering winter's night, the Pequod thrust her vindictive bows into the cold malicious waves, who should I see standing at her helm but Bulkington! I looked with sympathetic awe and fearfulness upon the man, who in mid-winter just landed from a four year's dangerous voyage, could so unrestingly push off again for still another tempestuous term. The land seemed scorching to his feet. . . Let me only say that it fared with him as with the storm-tossed ship, that miserably drives along the leeward land. The port would fain give succor; the port is pitiful; in the port is safety, comfort, hearth-stone, supper, warm blankets, friends, all that's kind to our mortalities. But in that gale, the port, the land, is that ship's direst jeopardy; she must fly all hospitality; one touch of land, though it but graze the keel, would make her shudder through and through. With all her might she crowds all sail off shore; in so doing, fights 'gainst the very winds that fain would blow her homeward; seeks all the lashed sea's landlessness again; for refuge's sake forlornly rushing into peril; her only friend her bitterest foe!

Know ye, now, Bulkington? Glimpses do ye seem to see of that mortally intolerable truth; that all deep, earnest thinking is but the intrepid effort of the soul to keep the open independence of the sea; while the wildest winds of heaven and earth conspire to cast her on the treacherous slavish shore.

But as in landlessness alone resides the highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God--so better is it to perish in that howling, infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety.¹

Might Harry Levin be right?² Could that restless haunted sailor be Melville's salute to a less robust but equally solitary Virginian, Edgar Allan Poe? As a character Bulkington is allowed to slip from view and so Melville's purpose for him remains obscure, but certainly that homelessness, that plunging ahead at all costs evokes the Edgar Allan Poe of his best tales and poems.

In considering the three sea tales of Edgar Allan Poe the allusion to Moby Dick is fortuitous. No matter what Melville's intent was, Bulkington resembles Poe sailing into an ocean of narrative and metaphysical possibilities cut off from the security of conventional havens of thought. In "MS Found in a Bottle", The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym, and "A Descent into the Maelstrom", Poe sent his protagonists to sea to confront the guilt, fears, and obsessions that haunt the dark caverns of the mind.

The sea in his tales is the arena wherein the struggle to know takes place, the struggle to move beyond platitudes and conventional rationalizations. It is essentially the same struggle, the struggle against psychic division that takes place in his other tales. Like nineteenth-century America in which the new industrialization fragmented economic and social life, Poe's narrators gravitate towards an inner strife. This inner conflict results from the failure of the characters to integrate the various aspects of their psyches. The heart and the mind appear diametrically opposed, and the will is divorced from feeling.

In his "Poetic Principle", Poe divides the mind into the separate faculties of intellect, taste, and moral sense, and many of his narrators suffer under the claims and counterclaims of their divided faculties. They seek to make one facet of the psyche subservient to the machinations of the other. William Wilson and Montresor seek to dominate and control the moral and emotional sides of their being. "Ligeia" examines the effort of the will to triumph over other impulses--intellectual, emotional, moral. Likewise, for each of the sailors, his sea adventure reveals the fierceness of the mind's struggle to come to terms with itself.

This motif of the breakdown of the personality runs through a good many of the tales, thereby linking together many seemingly disparate works. Prospero and the condemned narrator of "The Imp of the Perverse", Roderick Usher, and those unnamed narrators of "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" all try to deny a part of their being. In similar fashion Poe's three principal mariner characters set sail in the grip of one master faculty--the intellect in the cases of the Norseman and the author of the MS--the imagination in the case of Pym. Critics have at various times remarked on this underlying unity in Poe's work. Daniel Hoffman points out that "each of his writings is a comment and an extension upon his oeuvre"³, and Richard Wilbur has observed that

"dissimilar tales tell the same tale".⁴ The three sea tales continue and expand the probes Poe has elsewhere made of the human spirit, especially with respect to the fragmentation and alienation of personality. But at the same time they are a distinct group unto themselves.

Poe was aware of the sea as a potent symbol throughout much traditional literature. The convention of the sea voyage was a popular literary device, especially in nineteenth-century America, and its attitudes and values would have inevitably influenced the shaping of imaginative works of this period, particularly in the case of one so aware of current tastes as Poe, the magazine editor. The experiences in the sea tales embody for the figures involved the central questions of existence. Many of Poe's tales end with the denouement, the revelation, the character's or the reader's 'epiphany' to use Joyce's phrase, but the sea tales go beyond this. Poe's sailors go so far as to act upon their discoveries. They confront the terror and go beyond it. In essence, they suffer death and move through it. For however briefly a time, they live and act upon the knowledge gained at so fearful a price.

The sea tales form an important subgroup in Poe's canon. Patrick Quinn, for example, calls The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym of Nantucket a pivotal piece, "the one central and focusing story in the entirety of Poe's work".⁵ Daniel Hoffman sees it as one of Poe's three ambitious attempts "to unify in a single work his knowledge, terror, and transcendence".⁶ Quinn goes on to say that The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym is important because "through a study of this book one learns how Poe should be read".⁷ It is here that we find recurrent themes and characteristic methods given large scale expression. The study of The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, within the group of stories with which it is most closely associated in subject matter, themes, and imagery cannot help but

be illuminating: "To read the longest of Poe's sea stories in the light of the shortest one he wrote, "MS Found in a Bottle", is to become aware that in both cases a similar emotional and imaginative dynamism is at work".⁸

The tales have seldom been dealt with as a unit; yet in coming to understand one of these stories it is clear that we are led to a fuller understanding of the others. All of Poe's mariners face the ultimate terror, and all three transcend the horror and eagerly grasp at the knowledge embedded in the guilt, fears, and obsessions that have been confronted. The sea tales share a similar emotional response to the horror of the human situation, one that is played out amidst the rise and fall of the ocean currents. In these works the sea is not just a setting, but, as with Melville, a dynamic and towering symbol. It was a symbol that, as has been suggested, had come down through the ages and was taking on new vigour in the nineteenth century.

Considering the America of which he was a part, it was natural that Poe should have turned on different occasions to the sea for in the early nineteenth century the sea occupied a central position in the American consciousness. Up until around 1850 the American frontier was primarily a nautical one. Despite its recent independence it was still to the old continent that the new nation looked for supply of those goods and services she could not provide for herself. Even the emerging American literary scene labored under European--particularly British--influence with respect to the subject matter and taste and this was, incidentally, one of the things against which Poe, the magazine editor, struggled. Even as America sought to find and define her national identity the sea played an increasingly central role.

As it touched so much of the country, the sea was felt in almost all

aspects of the national life. The nation's commercial life was almost totally dependent on ocean travel. Both the goods she required and those she hoped to sell needed transportation back to the old continent, and the burgeoning national pride of this era fostered the development of a native merchant navy. This, in turn, gave rise to a great ship building industry. In addition, the American commitment to the sea had been intensified during the nation's early military conflicts. Naval successes of the Revolutionary War and more recently those of the War of 1812 nourished national pride. It was the sea, before 1850, and not the vast unexplored West, that seemed to offer the surest method of fulfilling the nation's grand visions. Naturally enough all this involvement with things nautical was reflected in the new flowering of a national literature.

As Thomas Philbrick points out in his study of American sea fiction, James Fenimore Cooper and a host of lesser writers took to the sea in this first part of the nineteenth century. Early works like his The Red Rover dealt with the more idealized and fantastic aspects of naval life. These early writers rejected the waning neo-classicism and humanism and adopted the emerging Romantic outlook. But Romantic theory was still developing and its application to the sea was tentative. It was the wild and primitive aspects that were given first attention. The symbolic and metaphysical perspectives were added as possibilities for the genre developed. These early works made much of the separateness and uniqueness of the sailor's life, dwelling on the glamorous and the exotic, the faraway ports and strange new places and animals.

Exciting as this material was, it could not long answer the needs of a pragmatic America. By the 1830's the glorious memories of the War of 1812 were fading and being replaced by more basic concerns. The American whaling industry was growing rapidly until, as Philbrick

observes, it comprised almost three quarters of the world's fleet. The continuous growth of oceanic trading and a bustling coastal shipping industry kept commercial marine interests in the forefront of American attention. A public so acclimated towards things of the sea began to desire a more realistic account of that life. Accordingly, Philbrick remarks, the history of the nautical novel between 1835-50 saw "the gradual disintegration of the idealized conception of maritime life"⁹ that had been constructed by Cooper and others in the early romances and an attempt was made to create a more probing view. Thus, the ship, for example in Cooper's Homeward Bound, was no longer the symbol of freedom from the responsibilities and restrictions of society but became instead a microcosm of that society.¹⁰

This was the tradition of which Poe's three sea tales were a part. It will be remembered that Patrick Quinn referred to The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym as a "pivotal" work in the Poe canon; here Philbrick, in quite a different context, sees Pym as occupying a "pivotal place in the development of American sea fiction".¹¹ In Pym as well as "MS Found in a Bottle" and "A Descent into the Maelstrom" we see where American sea fiction has been as well as where it was headed. To the extent that Poe relies on Gothic materials he is the fruition of the exotic and fantastic tradition which dominated the genre in the beginning. Each of the tales exhibits that special doom and disaster which emphasized the separateness of sea life. It is the lure of things strange and foreign. While still able to accommodate this sort of thing, the genre was emerging into a more realistic and yet more symbolic medium. To this also Poe was attuned. As Philbrick points out The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym was one of the first works in response to the general interest excited by the preparations for the United States Exploring Expedition led by Charles Wilkes which,

interestingly enough, set sail in the year Pym was published.¹² In terms of the genre, Pym demonstrates a development over the more exotic "MS" in that a genuine attempt is made to acquaint the reader with the realities of sailing as well as with the plant and animal life found in strange climes.

Considerable criticism has been made of this aspect of Poe's writing, some commentators calling it simply an attempt to pad the work, but others like Richard Levine, writing in the Poe Newsletter, consider the nautical detail--in the description of the disordered stowage in The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym, for example--as reflective of the mind's inner turmoil.¹³ Leaving the merit of this particular observation aside for the moment, Poe's inclusion of such data was in line with the direction in which the genre was headed. In "A Descent into the Maelstrom" as well, a conscientious attempt was made to ground the phenomenon which is at the centre of the story in as much scientific fact as possible. Melville, particularly in Moby Dick, was to perfect this technique. There the same detailed nautical lore is incorporated, though more copiously and overtly than in Poe. In tying a work of metaphysical significance to the concrete reality of daily sea life, however, it was Poe who pointed the way. In his three sea tales, Poe linked elements of metaphysical and symbolic significance and so prepared the way for Melville and the fulfillment of American sea fiction.

Thus the tradition of sea literature that had been developing over the country's early decades was important to Poe and he, in turn, was an integral part of its development. Philbrick sums up Poe's contribution to the genre by observing that:

Pym serves as a useful index to American attitudes towards the sea at the midpoint between The Pilot [Cooper] and Moby Dick. The mere fact a writer so

versatile and so sensitive to the vagaries of popular taste as Poe should choose to produce a sea novel at this time indicates the intensity of public demand for nautical literature. And in its very confusion of aims and concerns, its attempts to combine Gothic romanticism and documentary realism, scientific discovery and mystic revelation, Pym reflects the multifarious values that Americans in the late 1830's attached to the sea, a range of values which Cooper's early romances did not encompass.¹⁴

Beyond the American scene, Poe's use of sea materials links him to the Romantic outlook and its decisive shift from the perceptions of earlier ages. As W. H. Auden points out in his study of the sea in literature, The Enchafèd Flood, in Greek mythologies the sea was the "symbol for the primordial undifferentiated flux, the substance which became created nature only by having form imposed upon or wedded to it".¹⁵ Darwin and his scientific discoveries could only confirm what man through the ages had always felt to be true. The sea was essential to life, but for these early people it was a particularly dangerous and treacherous place to be. This attitude was conveyed in their literature. For them, Auden observes, a voyage was a necessary evil, something which had to be endured. The ship, then, was a precarious if essential vehicle and was an image of society only when that society was in danger, assaulted, and driven by forces beyond its control. Neither sea nor ship had the connotations of freedom and escape from responsibilities and restrictions which later ages would associate with it nor the function of providing a microcosmic view of society. As man's familiarity with the sea increased and as crossings became somewhat less dangerous the sea's meaning became altered. Shakespeare's handling of the sea and its symbols, Auden suggests, provides us with a transition between the Classic and Romantic points of view.

In earlier plays the storm is more purely negative, a reflection of human conflict or the fatal mischance

which provides evil with its opportunity (e. g. Othello). In the last plays, Pericles, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest, however, not only do the sea and the sea voyage play a much more important role, but also a different one. The sea becomes the place of purgatorial suffering; through separation and apparent loss, the characters disordered by passion are brought to their senses and the world of music and marriage is made possible.¹⁶

An important difference between the Classical and Romantic ages is that in Classical literature the voyage was always a necessity, a difficult means to a desired end. The traveler would never choose to go, never go for the pleasure of the journey. But for the Romantic, the voyage was able to capture in a special way the condition of man in a new industrialized age. To flee the city, the land, with its dehumanizing mechanical intrusions was the inevitable desire of the truly sensitive individual. For the Romantic "the sea is the real situation and the voyage is the true condition of man".¹⁷ In Romantic literature the sea is the arena where the consequential struggles of the human soul take place. As Melville phrases it, as was noted earlier, "the highest truth resides in landlessness". It was to find this truth, to rid himself of the values associated with the land that the Romantic took to the sea. He undertook his voyage eagerly. The voyage itself offered possibilities of meaning and discovery and was not just the undesired means to a desired end. In fact, the end for which the journey is taken remains vague and undefined. Ultimate ends were not really sought, nor were they thought to exist. Neither Ishmael nor Pym nor the author of the "MS Found in a Bottle" sail for clearly defined destinations. It is in the voyaging that they hope to find meaning. Similarly Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* abandons whatever may have originally led him to the sea and embraces instead the metaphysical harvest of the voyage.

The ship which carried the Romantic explorer on these journeys

became invested with new meanings. Its grace and agility suggested escape from the restrictions of the shore. Its ability to be steered and controlled made it seem an extension of man and his will--as if captain and crew were one man threading his way through the vast universe. The dependence of these magnificent vessels on the wind could capture in a special way the precariousness of man's position in the universe. Being alone at sea recalled man's essential alienation and isolation. Powerful symbol that it was the ship was able to project this range of feelings.

If thought of as isolated in the midst of the ocean a ship can stand for mankind and human society moving through time and struggling with its destiny. If thought of as leaving the land for the ocean, it stands for a particular kind of man and society as contrasted with the average landdwelling kind.¹⁸

Poe's mariners are of the latter variety. They reject the values associated with established society and seek the freedom of the open seas. They undertake what Auden calls "the search for possibility and the escape from necessity".¹⁹ This is clearest in the cases of the author of the "MS Found in a Bottle" and in The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym, but the Norseman of "A Descent into the Maelstrom" also rejects the strictures and cautions advocated by landed society in favor of the possibilities that lie beyond the maelstrom.

The land is the home of the known; it has ties and duties which bind. The sea cuts a man off from those claims, cuts him off from the joys of home, family, and community, from the joys of the body, the flesh, but equally it frees him from the limitations of these things. The world of the ship at sea is ascetic and austere. Days of the week and seasons of the year matter little in the duties of the ship. Everything around it is in flux; nothing is permanent. Somewhat paradoxically, this is the realm of the spirit. In the passage from Moby Dick cited earlier, the

symbolic potential of the land and sea is particularly vivid. The land offers "all that's kind to our mortalities", the comforts and joys of home and hearth. That offering of warmth and security is the ship's greatest threat. It would draw her to land where but the slightest touch would have fatal consequences. The pleasures and comforts of the body would ensnare the spirit. The land's, the body's offerings are the soul's direst jeopardy. Poe's mariners in rejecting the comforts and values of landed society reach out for the possibilities of the spirit. As Romantic heroes, they are solitary men seeking not happiness, but freedom, individuality, and fulfillment.

The sea is the arena for these private struggles. It takes man back to his beginnings. In putting him in touch with that from whence he came, the sea opens doors to long buried secrets. The sea tests him to his limits, and reveals his capacity for physical endurance as well as silhouetting his latent spiritual or psychological resourcefulness. The sea attempts to reveal to a man what he is as an individual and member of the human race.

All of Poe's mariners emerge as solitary figures because it is only deep within themselves that they can find that which they seek. Their search done, they turn outward again. With new knowledge they can engage other men with the newly acquired awe and terror contained within themselves. The author of the "MS Found in a Bottle", for example, uses his last moments in an ecstatic call to those he will never know. Even as he rushes toward more exciting knowledge, he hastens to share that already acquired. "It is true that I may not find an opportunity of transmitting it [the journal] to the world, but I will not fail to make the endeavour."²⁰

"MS Found in a Bottle"

"MS Found in a Bottle", published in 1833, was one of Poe's early successes, winning \$100 in a short story contest. The reasons for its success are readily apparent. It is a powerful, even spellbinding, tale. No extraneous element detracts from its single, preconceived effect. Like the narrator, the tale rushes headlong to its conclusion. In style and, as we shall see, in meaning it foreshadows many of the techniques and symbols that will become characteristic of his writing. Steeped in blackness and whiteness, whirling, plunging vortices hint at the enveloping chaos. In the midst of such terror stands the solitary individual stripped of the comfort and disguises of life.

Characteristically, the narrator is a strongly rational figure. With him "the reveries of fancy had long been a dead letter". He is at pains to make clear his turn of mind. He was contemplative and methodical and in no way seems disturbed by the "deficiency of imagination". Indeed, he wants it clearly understood that his MS is no product of a "crude imagination", and speaks of remaining at all times within the "severe precincts of truth". He tells us that the study of the German moralists gave him "great delight", not in their teachings, but rather in their fallibility, which allows him to "detect their falsities". He revels in the revelation of the errors of others without greatly adding to the general store of truth. This attitude affects his personal relations as well, for he is isolated from his family and country. Indeed, he has spent much of his life in travel.

In spite of his skepticism--his Pyrrhonism--his wanderings have not been without torment: "A kind of nervous restlessness haunted me as a fiend". Aware of the anxiety but unable to account for it, he simply

continues his journeying. Our traveler, thus, seems well suited to the kind of quest that lies ahead. His voyage begins in stillness, but the "entire calm" is foreboding even though there is only the "very singular isolated cloud" to "beguile the monotony". The captain perceives no danger, and so sets no watch. At midnight the narrator can restrain his uneasiness no longer and so ventures forth to see what can be learned of the situation.

He is instantly catapulted into a world of nature gone savage. A description of the elements defies his imagination. In the face of the blast his Pyrrhonism cannot be sustained. His physical predicament is overwhelming. It is discovered that all have perished except for himself and an old Swede. Recognizing that they cannot manage the ship, they are swept along at appalling speed into a world of pitchy blackness. They rise and plunge from fearful heights to terrifying depths. They know only that they travel southward at a fantastic velocity. Death, the narrator decides, can hardly be deferred beyond the hour. In this state of the "utter hopelessness of hope" they catch their first glimpse of the gigantic ship that will carry the traveler ever deeper into this terrifying experience. At this moment, overcome by a sudden sense of "self-possession", he "awaited fearlessly the ruin that was to overwhelm" him. Surprisingly, the collision results in his transference to the larger vessel. The change, thus signalled, is profound. His self-possession will allow him to take an active, though helpless, role in his destiny. Amidst the continuing terror, a sense of awe overtakes him: "A feeling, for which I have no name, has taken possession of my soul . . . a new entity is added to my soul".

His new vessel is peopled with aged sailors who "will not see" (Poe's

italics). While on their ship the voyager carelessly dabs paint on a sail only to later see the word "Discovery" flying overhead (Poe later abandoned this sort of obviousness). As the ship is drawn ever southward into a black area of gleaming ice ramparts and even more turbulent seas the man is drawn out of himself:

To conceive the horror of my sensations is, I presume, impossible; yet a curiosity to penetrate the mysteries of these awful regions predominates even over my despair and will reconcile me to the most hideous aspect of death. It is evident that we are hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge--some never-to-be imparted secret whose attainment is destruction.

The knowledge it appears will save him from despair, though not destruction. The aged sailors grow hopeful, but the narrator goes down taking the final knowledge with him. In an afternote Poe suggests that the ship has been drawn into the bowels of the earth.

What is it that the sailors will not see? They obviously can see for he mentions charts, maps, and they move about the ship unaided. What is the "exciting" discovery that the narrator carries with him into the bowels of the earth? Has he learned it as he scans the heights and depths of the universe in the ceaseless plunging of the sea? The tale may be irresolute when compared with the achievement of the later sea tales, yet we can see clearly the essence of Poe's art present at this early stage.

As Allen Tate has observed, "in discussing any writer or in coming to terms with him, we must avoid the trap of mere abstract evaluation and try and reproduce the actual conditions of our relationship to him".²¹ This is of fundamental importance to an understanding of Poe. When distracted from those "actual conditions" one can easily wander into a subjective and conjectural psychological analysis or a study of sources. As fascinating and as useful as these can be, they essentially miss the mark. The important question is: why it is, and how it is that Poe's

story works its will on us. As readers of the "MS Found in a Bottle", we feel the pull of that great vortex as it draws the narrator down.

To achieve or arrive at an understanding of Poe one has to skirt a thin line between two possible approaches to literature, each with its own proponents and detractors. Separately, they are capable of distorting the balance giving perhaps undue weight to the various aspects it deems appropriate, but together they can suggest the vast richness in a true literary work of art. First of all, Floyd Stovall says that it is within the tale or poem that the critic should look for its meaning. Before considering the unconscious, he warns, the critic "should understand all that the poet's conscious self has contributed. To affirm that a work of imagination is only a report of the unconscious is to degrade the creative artist to the level of an amanuensis".²² But Maud Bodkin, an equally notable critic, suggests that it is

Not a complete account of a poem as an imaginative achievement to trace literary sources of its imagery and to refer to the effort of conscious thought and will ordering in accordance with a lucidly conceived design The design itself is determined by forces that do not lie open directly to thought, nor to the control of the will, but of which we may learn something through the comparative study of literary material and its psychological analysis.²³

One would not like to argue with either scholar, since what each says is essentially true. Clearly the conscious self is the determining factor or we might all be great authors. Poe was clearly such a conscious artist. In describing the skillful artist he has observed that "having deliberately conceived a certain single effect to be wrought, he then invents such incidents, he then combines such events, and discusses them in such tone as may best serve him in establishing this preconceived effect".²⁴ The evidence of this artist's "construction" is everywhere present. The incidents and tone join to create the effect of awe and terror.

It would be a serious error to denigrate Poe's conscious ordering of parts to achieve his effects. But it would be equally wrong, we must acknowledge, to underestimate the more hidden aspects of his narrative art. There is a flow between tale and reader that cannot be truly accounted for by any construction of incidents. In the "MS Found in a Bottle", the pull one feels towards the vortex is a pull from the deepest parts of our being. Poe, like his narrators, looked within, and he, too, may have been shocked by what he found therein. Each of Poe's sailor-narrators is also an author. Poe, thus, understands their narrative aspirations, their need to get the tale told. Poe's conscious ordering of the tale, then, works its will.

The "MS Found in a Bottle" works well as a simple narrative of adventure. All the necessary elements of a fantastic account are present along with a sensitive and intelligent figure to recount the experience. Even the subsequent transmission of the MS back to society is plausibly accounted for. Poe wanted his readers, though, to look further, and this is evident from the many clues and introductions into the tale's interior meaning that he provides. The first and perhaps most obvious one is the "thoughtless touches" which spell out "Discovery". The narrator's language becomes increasingly excited as the events proceed. What, one is asked to determine, is this discovery which has produced so marked a change on the narrator--particularly as he had been at some pains to show how resistant he was to such inclinations? One is led, then, quite naturally into the interior of the tale. The discovery cannot be told completely because, of course, the narrator has not finished his descent. But his meaning, the discovery of his own potential for discovery is embodied in his tale. And he has made certain we will have his tale.

One must look now towards those "undercurrents of meaning which can

only be called up by the reader".²⁵ The incidents of the tale have led us to the irrevocable realization that there is a discovery to be made. The revelation is in the tale, the frame upon which the incidents are hung. We know from the opening characterization of the narrator that he is a strongly rational figure and is so to the exclusion of imagination and emotional attachments. His years of travel testify to his isolation and his desire to remain so. He travels alone and makes no mention of even any casual acquaintance. He would seem to be free of the pulls and ties of the world--unencumbered by the attachments that weigh so heavily on the landlocked.

But even here amidst the openness of the sea he is overtaken. His mind alerts him to the strangeness of the calm, but to no avail. He is dependent on the captain whose mind perceives no danger. At midnight, unable to stand the uncertainty any longer, he ventures forth. But in that very instant he is overtaken by forces far greater than himself and from which there is no escape. Along with the nameless old Swede he is buffeted, helpless in the grip of the elements. For five days and nights there is a steady increase in terror. There are incalculable velocities, dizzying heights, fearsome depths, impenetrable blackness until a crescendo is reached with the appearance of the strange gigantic ship. As noted above, the collision of the two vehicles results in his transference to the larger vessel, and we sense here also a transference from one state to another. Before sighting the gigantic ship he had observed that death could no longer be held at bay and so he gives into despair. A new feeling surpasses that despair. At first he characterizes it as self-possession, but then goes on to see it as a new feeling for which he has no name but which begins to take precedence over all other concerns. Still he doesn't know how to understand the new impression. To

a rational mind the overtones of this new experience are evil. His past experience will not account for it. His mind is powerless to fathom it. But even so he begins to see other possibilities, the most wonderful being the new sense that floods his soul: "A new sense--a new entity is added to my soul".

In discussing his interior make-up the traveler has stressed his intellectual abilities. With pride he points out his lack of fancy, his lack of emotional involvement or commitment. For him "the reveries of fancy have been a dead letter and a nullity". This new sense, it seems, nullifies this detachment as well as producing a marked change in his character. Where before he had apparently avoided serious contact with his fellow beings, he now seeks this out. He conceives the idea of a journal in which he promises to record the experience of his strange venture. He acknowledges that his manuscript may never reach society but vows to make the attempt to reach out to his fellow men. This turning outward is significant to the traveler's achievement of an understanding of his situation, and this pattern will be repeated in other tales.

One can see a change in his situation as he views the possible outcome of his new experience. Whereas in the beginning he dreaded death, the horror he now sees is that he may be "doomed to hover continually upon the brink of Eternity, without taking a final plunge". This is, indeed, a fundamental change. As long as they were being tossed about in the ship there would presumably have been the opportunity for rescue. But this no longer seems important. There is, in truth, a fate worse than death. His new desire is not a death wish as such. He has given us no reason to suppose that he wishes to end his life. It is rather eternity that he seeks, and personal obliteration carries no grief in the face of

eternity.

The notion is much akin to the ideas discussed in Eureka, the prose poem which Poe published in 1845. In this long and abstruse work Poe sought to explain the universe as well as the working of the human mind within that universe. Basic to his theory was the concept of attraction and repulsion. Particles expand to fill the limits of eternity and rush inward again to the simple unity from which they sprang. Poe saw the workings of this universe as parallel to the workings of the mind. The individual rushes out to the limits of his being only to be drawn back again. His conscious acts of decision while allowing him to stand alone as a fully formed individual also cut him off from the community of fellowship among men. He comes to crave that collectivity. He seeks to abandon his individuality, before birth. In this sense, then, personal obliteration is a restoration. It is for this that the author of the manuscript now lings. One might again note the passage cited above where he speaks of the horror of his situation overtaken by a curiosity to reach out that he might gain knowledge even though such knowledge may mean destruction. Clearly, it is better to die with knowledge than to live in ignorance. The ignorance of his past life is no longer tolerable. He seeks the plunge.

There are now many clues towards the nature of that knowledge, but still it lies buried in the heart of the tale. With each reading, however, the distillation of meaning is yet finer. What emerges is the study of a mind struggling to know itself and its place in the universe, that larger universe in which all matter both material and spiritual is a part. In a kind of reverse synecdoche the narrator has a mind estranged from itself. It excludes the imagination, the senses, the emotions as if they have no role. The mind, then, engages in study and in travel, seeking distance in miles and skepticism. Thus free and unencumbered, the mind would be

independent and powerful. In the midst of its supposed security it is overtaken by powerful, irrefutable facts of existence. Nature cannot and will not be ignored. Other details of the story now come to the fore. The ship is drawn ever southward by what the narrator can only conclude to be a strong current or undertow--some unseen but powerful force. Now, the South might mean many things. Marie Bonaparte has considered it an image of the mother, for Poe.²⁶ Clearly Poe, the aristocrat, was more at home in the South than he could ever have been in the industrial North. Poe most likely would have felt a return to the South as a journey home. As the ship travels southward the notion of a homeward, interior journey is reenforced. But the south--the South Pole--was also the last major unexplored land mass. It excited interest in Poe's day and its attraction for him was given considerable play in The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym.

It is the old men whose decision not to see first helps the narrator and the reader to recognize that there is something to see. Though their old age carries with it great infirmity, it is rather with reverence, awe, and wonder that the narrator regards them than with pity. This wonder arises out of nothing supernatural for, we are told, there is nothing about the captain which suggests "more or less than a man". The narrator finds a similarity between the captain and himself in their heights--which incidentally is also Poe's height--which might again suggest the closeness Poe feels for his narrator, separate though they might have been in other respects. About their ship there is also a sense of mystery. In studying her strange shape he notices that "there will occasionally flash across my mind a sensation of familiar things and there is always mixed up with such indistinct shadows of recollection an unaccountable memory of old foreign chronicles and ages long ago". With these aged men, then, and their strange ship there is an aura of half-remembered ideas. Clearly, this is

no ordinary ship and crew--even the wood seems unsuitable. It is among these ancient sailors that our narrator wanders; it is with these half-remembered ideas that the mind rushes to meet its destiny. We can see, then, the direction in which the narrator's mind is propelled. It reaches deep within itself, into the subconscious, that vast field of half-remembered ideas, while yet reaching out to his fellow men. That these ideas flow concurrently is essential to the meaning of the tale.

The narrator's mind, then, is determined to reach out, to share, to communicate the experience with his fellow men. In noticing when this change overtook this solitary traveler, one recalls that he conceives the idea while on board the strange gigantic ship after the "new sense" has overtaken his soul. And this new sense is admitted only after he had given up clinging to life. Death was at hand and there could no longer be any thought of personal security. In giving up personal concern the experience takes on deep meaning. All that takes place after the sighting of the gigantic ship could be dream. The effect is the same either way--to open to the narrator the gates of his real being.

The tale is an account of the mind trying to discover its relationship to itself, to others, and to the universe. Neither the mind nor the man can live totally alone as this leads only to barren travels and skeptical studies. In looking outward, he finds his place within and vice-versa.

It might be useful here to note another pattern that will grow to greater fruition in subsequent tales. Maud Bodkin calls the pattern the rebirth archetype. There is, she says, "a movement downward, or inward toward the earth's center, or a cessation of movement--a physical change which . . . appears also as a transition towards disintegration and death. This element in the pattern is balanced by a movement upward and outward --an expansion or burst of activity, a transition toward reintegration

and life renewal".²⁷ The upward movement is not emphasized fully in this tale. There is death, but there is just as clearly the renewal of life in the activity of the soul that rushes with excitement towards new knowledge and even in its final moments reaches out toward a reintegration with life, with society, with those for whom experience may open new roads. The pattern will gain strength and clarity, but its presence here testifies to the essential optimism of the tale. Knowledge can and must be found, and if at the cost of personal obliteration, so be it. Poe was not dealing with personal well-being. His own life offered little security in that regard. Knowledge is the thing--knowledge gained and shared. At great personal peril Poe's mariners come to a truer understanding of the self and of the collectivity, the community that exists among men.

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym

The life of Arthur Gordon Pym, on the other hand, was full of security and well-being. But this security was rejected in a determined bid to go to sea. The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, written in 1837, is Poe's second story of the sea. Here the conventions of the sea voyage play a larger role than in the "MS Found in a Bottle". A young boy, his imagination inflamed by the tales of a companion's whaling voyages, decides to abandon all and seek his fate at sea. Poe's tale abounds with the stuff of conventional sea adventures. There is mutiny, shipwreck, famine, and treachery, but the haunting appeal of the stories lies elsewhere. It is the boy, Pym, who fascinates--not so much because of those wild and incredible adventures which happen to him but rather because of the way in which he responds to them. Young, reckless, and impulsive he seems the very embodiment of the nomadic American ideal--"Go west" they told him.

Rather than go west, Pym goes to sea. But not for a single instant does he dream of the riches and rewards that should rightfully, one probably feels, be his at the end of such a quest: "My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death and 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". Yet despite such visions, such premonitions, Pym and the reader are eager to go. We approve his urgings to explore further--into Antarctica. Never once does he think of returning home; indeed, never after bearding the Grampus does Pym give a single thought of home. What has been sailed away from, what innocence and naivete filled those years are now irretrievably gone. His only future, whatever it may be lies ahead.

Pym's narrative was slow to gain recognition. Sidney Kaplan calls it a "criminally neglected classic".²⁸ Arthur Hobson Quinn has noted that

it may have been written at the suggestion of Harper Brothers Publishing Company--as long works seemed to sell better.²⁹ In addition, it may have been an attempt to capitalize on the great public interest in exploration and travel which, as Philbrick has demonstrated, was very much in vogue during this period.³⁰ Poe himself may have cherished a hope for popular success, but it was not to be had. The tale's brooding and mysterious end did not win favor with the reading public. Yet that same ending has maintained a tenacious hold on sensitive readers. As Arthur Quinn again notes, when the details are forgotten, the mysterious figure remains.³¹ Paradoxically, that white figure may have prevented the tale's popularity but just as equally it has accounted for its survival.

In spite of such an enigmatic ending the tale offers a strong straightforward beginning. "My name is A. Gordon Pym . . . My father . . . My maternal grandfather." From the very opening words the focus is on Pym. It is important that we come to know him. He wants us to know more than simply what happens to him. In sharp contrast to Poe Pym was well situated financially. His father was a respected seller of sea supplies in the prosperous town of Nantucket. His grandfather was in a strong enough position to offer an inheritance to his grandson. In short, Pym was well based on land. With the aid of the good education with which he had been provided, life seemed hopeful and stable. Critics like Marie Bonaparte suggest that such financial and educational gifts were a kind of wish fulfillment on the part of the tale's orphaned author. More to the point, Pym's financial security is an essential element of his tale. This was no voyage of necessity as there is no pressing reason for him to venture forth; rather, reason urged him to remain. Everything contrived to keep Pym in prosperous Nantucket's arms. Within reach was all the well-being the land could offer. Pym's reasons for going remain vague

and unstated, but we have from the beginning a rejection of conventional values and, thus, the injunction to look elsewhere for his motives.

Throughout the narrative Poe exercises firm authorial control, putting to the lie those critics who, like Bonaparte, charge that the tale ran away with him, that it became too big to handle.³² Time and again items and incidents that may have been thought of as filler are seen to play an integral part in Pym's real narrative. His "digressions" on stowage and the rookeries of albatrosses and penguins, for example, have intrinsic value. As an editor, Poe understood current tastes and interests; as a nearly penniless author he would have liked to appeal to these interests; but ever the artist, each detail, each incident seems to expand the scope or deepen the intensity of the tale's overall design.

It is the overall design that we must search out amidst this most elaborate of arabesques. Initially, the tale excites the reader like a true life adventure but gradually ~~the~~ interest in this aspect weakens. We begin to notice that the appearances serve a reality different from documentation. Our suspicions are confirmed almost as soon as we enter the polarized world of Tsalal. Pym repeatedly tells us it is like no world he or the crew have ever known. Not the least of its peculiarities is the opposition between black and white. The shades arranged so steadfastly on opposite sides have connotations impossible to ignore. Black and white, these most symbolic of colors, cry out to be noticed. Locked within this dichromatic tableau is the seed of our awakening to Pym's most probing journey.

From the beginning, Pym has revealed his naiveté. He is an ingénue in this matter of exploration. Life up to now had been good, but he is looking for something more. He knows that he must depend on others and so turns to his friend Augustus as the one most likely to help him. Two years older, Augustus had been in the South Seas with his father. From that

adventure he could find much with which to excite his younger companion's imagination. So strong is the hold that Augustus acquires that Pym completely surrenders to the older boy's urgings. Augustus has both the means--his father's whaling vessel--and the knowledge--familiarity and experience on sailing voyages--to help Pym accomplish his goal of escape to the sea. Augustus is superb--almost every detail is taken care of. But not for nothing have we been told of the boys' earlier misadventure aboard the Ariel. Besides showing Pym's gullibility, it has revealed much of the character of Augustus, on whom Pym will so depend. Augustus may well be the accomplished sailor--Pym had been "depending entirely on the nautical skill of my friend"--but all his skill is useless when his common sense fails due to intoxication. This weakness Pym fails to notice just as he overlooks the marked difference in the manner in which they respond to their predicament. Pym did whatever could be done and then surrendered his fate to his god. "I recommended myself to God and made up my mind to bear whatever might happen with all the fortitude in my power". With this he plunges directly into his fate. As luck would have it, they are saved by the determined efforts of an incoming ship's crew. Pym, who vowed to accept his fate, is rescued easily. Augustus, who struggles, is almost given up as lost.

Pym includes this adventure in his narrative as a prelude to more momentous happenings. It does much to establish the character of the two boys. It is their personalities which will shape much of the action that follows. Often they are overwhelmed, but just as often they sail deliberately into their predicaments. Augustus is older, more experienced and, clearly, the leader of the two, yet his inability to manage his liquor reveals a vulnerability Pym would have been wise to note. Pym, the younger, is quite easily led. As he is not so experienced, he is dependent on the skills of his companion.

The Ariel incident reveals Pym's particular susceptibilities. He remarks that one would think that such a hazardous incident would have dampened any lingering passion for the sea. But Arthur is no ordinary boy. His conversations with Augustus grow more frequent and yet more intense. Thus begins a pattern we will see repeated throughout this sea tale. In contradiction to all apparent logic and even rationality, Pym determines to go to sea. There is no good reason for going. It is unlikely that he would achieve greater financial success than that already promised by his grandfather, who, in fact, threatens to disown him should he go. He stands to lose more than he might gain. But Pym never speaks of gain. His premonitions are much more somber. Still he feels bound to fulfill them even if they be as gloomy as he senses. Why then does he go? He himself professes not to know what possesses him at such moments. He knows only that he must go to sea. Clearly and emphatically he rejects the values associated with land--security and stability. He seeks new values and new discoveries. What these might be is inherent in the voyage.

Much has been made of the similarity between the names of A. Gordon Pym and that of his creator, Edgar Allan Poe. Poe does much to support the connection. It is after all Edgarton from which they sail away. Pym is blessed with loving and wealthy relations as Poe often wished himself to be. Careful reading will reveal this to be a highly personal narrative, as is the case with all of Poe's writings. But just as one would be foolish to identify too closely the mad ravings of Willian Wilson with the author who understood that those anxieties and obsessions lay not in Wilson's look alike companion but in the tortured narrator himself, so it would be equally foolish to associate too closely Pym, the created boy, with the creating author. Daniel Hoffman quotes Professor James Cox who suggests that the name Pym, rather than any rhythmic equivalent to the author's own name,

may be an anagram.³³ Poe was certainly fond of such puzzles. Harry Levin suggests several others in the tale. Tsalal, for example, may be an anagram for 'as tall' or perhaps even 'a stall'.³⁴ Pym may, then, be a disguised form of Imp--that figure met throughout Poe's oeuvre. His portrait is best painted here in the all-too-real scene on the island of Tsalal when Pym's fear of falling gives way to his longing to fall. But we see him here and throughout Poe's tales as that force which compells us to act in what seems direct opposition to our apparent self-interest. It is what urges those murderers in "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat" to reveal their crimes.

So fascinated was Poe by this faculty that he wrote a short piece on it entitled simply "The Imp of the Perverse". It might be well to digress here and examine a pattern that will grow throughout Pym's narrative. The tale is a condemned man's final plea to be understood. Tomorrow he dies. Many years before, through cunning ways, he killed his benefactor and then inherited his wealth. For years he lived with the security that, through his careful planning, detection was impossible. This afforded him more pleasure than all the material advantages accruing from his crime. So content with himself was he that in pondering his security, as he frequently did, he would mutter to himself "I am safe". A casual thought grows. "I am safe--I am safe; yes, if I be not fool enough to make an open confession". Within moments his whole demeanor has changed. As if possessed, he begins running through the streets alarming the populace. In the grip of the most terrible oppression he blurts forth his secret in a clear and distinct voice. Why has he done it? Is it likely that one would do such a thing?

The narrator has prefaced his story with a slightly lengthier account of the human spirit as revealed by his experience. He wishes "to explain . . . why I am here". He speaks of a "propensity", an inclination

which man has overlooked--not through ignorance or lack of vision, he states, but "in the pure arrogance of our reason". Reason has no use for it, sees "no need of the impulse", and so has tried to account for its workings in other ways. These thinkers, intellectual rather than observant, set out to explain, to categorize nature on the basis of what they thought God's plan to be. Far better it would have been, he suggests, had we observed what men actually did. Such observations would have forced us to admit the existence of this propensity he calls perverseness.

"Through its promptings we act without comprehensible object . . . we act for the reason we should not. In theory no reason can be more unreasonable; but, in fact, there is none more strong". This inclination exists, thus, in spite of, in contrast to, and in defiance of reason. Who has not, he asks, felt such urgings? It is this perverseness which causes us to procrastinate. What can be the good of such postponement? Even forewarned of hardships and danger we yet stall. Who has not capriciously annoyed and hurt those whom he had no desire to antagonize? We do it because we should not. In a passage reminiscent of that memorable incident of Pym's longing to fall, he recounts that implacable change from horror to longing. Even stripped of personality the passage retains its power. That which we "know" we should avoid we seek. And we do so for reasons we cannot account for with logic: "Beyond or behind this there is no intelligible principle", he tells us. But its existence, as described, is difficult to deny. Each of us has at some time acted for reasons that appear unreasonable and which seem to offer no benefit to ourselves.

But this propensity toward perverseness exists and plays its role within human life. We seem not to understand it nor the manner in which it "might be made to further the objects of humanity, either temporal or moral". Herein lies the intriguing core of the matter. We act for no

logical reason and for no apparent good. How, then, might the objects of humanity be furthered? What, then, are the objects of humanity? Was it good that our murderer-narrator blurted out his crime? He seems not to regret it, seeking only to explain it. And what have been the consequences of his action? He is tried, convicted, and condemned: "Today I wear these chains and am here! Tomorrow I shall be fetterless!--but where?" (Poe's italics). His confession has brought him to that final tomorrow. He stands poised at the edge of a precipice, at the rim of an immense vortex. At any moment he will plunge. We harken back to another earlier Poe tale wherein the narrator also stands poised before a final plunge. He, we remember, hungered for that "exciting knowledge". Has this perversity, then, furthered the objects of humanity--eternal if not temporal? If knowledge, whatever its source and subject, be an object then yes, a resounding yes. Pym, throughout his adventure, will act within the grip of this perversity. Time and again he does what we know he shouldn't. His perverseness will bring him, also, to the brink of that white cataract. He, too, has not a single thought of avoiding the encounter. Pym has a tale to tell. He dies mysteriously in the midst of telling it. Would he have had a tale to tell had he stayed on land amidst the security of his education and inherited wealth? He has judged such a life not worth living and risked all to escape its embrace. Pym's Imp led him from that gray security.

Thus it is that Pym determines to go to sea. Despite the hazards he envisions, despite the objections of both Captain Barnard and his family, he goes. The benefits are hidden. The setting out is not easy. Nevertheless, the problem caused by his mother's hysteria and grandfather's threat of disinheriting "only adds fuel to the flames". The obstacles only arouse his Imp of the Perverse. To surmount these hindrances Pym must rely on the

skill of Augustus, for it is he who hits upon the plan. Augustus thinks of everything--almost. Pym's absence from home is plausibly accounted for; arrangements and provisions are gathered in the hold. Once an opportunity is found it is quickly put into effect. The only impediment remaining is the chance encounter with his grandfather as Pym is about to board the Grampus. Unceremoniously the old man and all he represents are rejected. This done, Pym is safe and takes possession of his new compartment. Though he feels the satisfaction of a monarch, his palace is simply a long, narrow, iron box buried deep within the belly of an old hulk. Eagerly he accepts his entombment.

Augustus' skillful arrangements cannot prevent Pym's great suffering when events take a sudden turn. Augustus has made no plans for the unexpected, and significantly, he remains powerless to respond to the new situation for many days. In that time Pym, who has in fact submitted to a living burial, undergoes the terrors of the damned. He is trapped. The vapors combine with hunger and thirst to render him powerless. He is unable to take any effective action--too weak to move the chain cable, too disoriented to thread his way through the cluttered stowage. Symmetrically, this jumble below deck reflects the fresh chaos that has taken hold above deck. Indeed, both will work to destroy the Grampus. While Pym suffers in impotent isolation a mutiny has taken place. Established sea life has been replaced by brawling, bickering disorder. Augustus has seen it all but can do nothing. The evil men prove too strong. To his aid comes the half-breed Dirk Peters.

Peters' appearance and friendship are, indeed, fortuitous. On him will come to rest many of Pym's hopes throughout the long voyage. Peters is a swarthy, misshapen, and powerful figure. He saves Augustus' life and welcomes Pym. It is he who will put Pym's plan into effect. With force

the ship is retaken, but their victory is short-lived. They have been saved from certain death at the mate's hands, but the life to which Pym again emerges is yet more terrible. Through his narrative we begin to see this pattern emerge. Beginning as an innocent boy asleep, he takes to the sea in a small boat. By luck, he is saved from a simple death by drowning only to suffer a living burial beneath the decks of the Grampus. He emerges to find a more real horror above. All on which he had put his trust has been overturned by the treacherous hearts of men. His full emergence into the life of the ship is again more terrible. The further he sails from those safe Nantucket shores the more dire his situation becomes. Augustus is grievously wounded in the fracas. They will soon sorely need the aid he could have provided. For now, almost at the moment of their success, it is the elements that seem to leap into increased fury. The mutiny had neglected the care of the ship, and now, in the storm, the disordered stowage shifts and rolls and claims its toll. The brig capsizes. They have been abandoned. The death-bearing ship floats past with its stench and horror. The living ship sails gaily off not wishing to be bothered. Thus abandoned by the living and the dead, they are left to themselves. Isolated in the vast ocean this small group of survivors must turn to themselves to endure the hardships of the voyage. It is left to Parker to mention the terrible idea. All embrace it willingly except Pym, who has no choice. To that end lots are drawn and Parker falls victim to his own idea. His contribution is hoarded and sustains them for several days. With Parker gone the survivors are reduced to the essential three: Augustus, who made possible Pym's escape to the sea, Peters, whose strength has saved them more than once, and Pym, whose voyage we share.

They drift south and cross the Equator. There below that line that divides the halves of the world Augustus finally dies. The wounds he

suffered in the struggle to regain the brig have continued to eat away at his strength. The predicament has proved to be too much for Augustus. For all his experience and skillful planning, he is useless in this new situation. Peters and Pym wait for nightfall to abandon the corpse. No detail escapes Poe's notice in his compilation of horrors and so it is that Augustus' leg is severed as the putrid corpse is lifted. Now Pym must sail onward with only Peters. Augustus' absence, while mourned, is not greatly regretted as he had been of little assistance. It may seem as though all that could possibly happen to them has happened, but fate holds yet more cards. For some days the ship seemed to be tilting. They do what they can to secure what possessions they have. But alas all are lost as the ship capsizes. Once free of the sharks the situation seems not as bad as they had feared, for the keel, it is discovered, is plentifully covered with barnacles. This provision need only last a few days since a sail is soon spotted bearing directly upon them. Experience, however, has taught them restraint. They have been passed before and a footnote even suggest that such an incident is not rare or even accidental. The elements are cruel, but man, it seems, is just as cruel.

But happily the Jane bears a steady course towards them and they are rescued. After rest and nourishment they are again made well. The Jane is commanded by Captain Guy, an urbane and experienced seaman "deficient, however, in energy and in the spirit of enterprise". The fate of Pym and Peters will be carried forward by him. Captain Guy and Pym enter into an intense relation. With Augustus, Pym had shared "a partial interchange of character". With Guy, Pym comes to acquire "much influence over him". Powerless though Pym is in his own right, he again takes and shapes the situation to his own purpose. And so they sail boldly for the south. In the face of this it is difficult to agree with those who see Pym as a

purely passive character. Despite his own apparent lack of power he has remarkably good luck at bending others to his direction. Although he was quite literally dependent on Augustus as he is now on Captain Guy, each willingly ends up doing his bidding.

The Jane had been engaged in a broad mission of trade with no predetermined course. After criss-crossing the southern seas looking for trade and uncharted islands Captain Guy decides to set sail for the South Pole. His was not the first attempt to reach this intriguing and unknown region. In spite of extensive exploration, however, a vast uncharted area remained: "Of course a wide field lay before us for discovery, and it was with feelings of most intense interest that I heard Captain Guy express his resolution of pushing boldly to the southward." This "intense interest" will sustain and urge Captain Guy onward when all others would have given up the attempt. No mention is made of Peters and his desires.

As they set a southward sail they encounter large ice floes, but these, amazingly, are left behind as they cross the Antarctic circle. The weather is reasonably comfortable at 33°. In an effort to further understand their situation they study the current and find it flowing north at a rate of one quarter mile per hour. But their situation is not stable. Again they meet ice, and again it is left behind as they sail further southward, and then they find the current has shifted to a southerly setting. The rate of flow increases steadily from one half to one mile per hour. This discovery makes no small impression on the ship's crew, including Captain Guy. Exploiting the Captain's sensitivity to ridicule, Pym is able to subdue his apprehension.

Peters has been allowed to slip back into obscurity. He neither approves nor disapproves of the course the Jane has set. But he rises dramatically to the fore with the appearance of the huge Arctic bear. The

animal is attacked and shot as a source of food. Despite its wounds, it returns the attack to the utter consternation of all on board, save Peters: "Nothing but his promptness and agility saved us from destruction," Pym notes. With his great strength he succeeds in stabbing the bear. The appearance of the animal is somewhat unusual. In keeping with its species it is perfectly white but seems considerably larger than normal and its eyes have a blood red color. Visually the bear recalls the other strange looking animal they encountered which seemed to be a hybrid of cat's head and dog's ears. Like the bear, its hair is perfectly white and its claws and teeth a brilliant scarlet. Together these animals formed the gateway into a strange new world of black and white.

Their journey has taken them further south than anyone has yet been. To temper the crew's eagerness, practical concerns begin to weigh. Fuel is short and symptoms of scurvy appear. Captain Guy begins to give serious thought to returning. Pym is indignant. Shortly before, on a barren and desolate island, they found the prow of a canoe. This and the mild climate suggests that the path ahead may be far less desolate than the return route. Having come so far, he cannot abide the idea of returning. That great field for discovery still lies ahead. So forceful are his urgings that Captain Guy is persuaded to push forward. Pym, then, is responsible for the events that follow. Hindsight, they say, has 20/20 vision. Looking back, having survived the white vision, the bloody violence and black treachery, Pym stands by the decision he so forcefully pressed on Captain Guy. While he cannot help but regret the violent and bloody happenings which ensued, he also tells us that he cannot help but be pleased that he was instrumental in opening the doors of knowledge. Despite his own discomfort and danger, Pym is glad to have gone ahead. In spite of its harrowing cost, then, the journey was well advised. Pym stands emphatically behind his voyage and the

truth it has opened up for scrutiny.

Once the decision has been reached to continue, they sail right into the island of Tsalal. The world of black and white polarities, suggested by the strange white animals in a steadily darkening sea, is maintained from the beginning. In the blackness of Tsalal, Pym encounters the depths of depravity. It is a last haven for men in their most basic state. Beyond the island is the white with its inherent elusiveness. White for the islanders has become a kind of taboo. They cannot face that unknown and so reject it at all costs. The island can abide no white. No action is too drastic to keep it from them. Not only does the Jane's crew bring white to their sheltered island, but they, urged by Pym, wish to sail into that even stronger whiteness and propose to return. Pym, however cannot be effectively deterred. The pull toward discovery is too strong.

The world of Tsalal is totally alien. Everything is different from what they had known previously. Even the water has its own peculiarities. This strangeness and their own vulnerability induce caution on the part of the Captain and crew and a skeptical eye is kept on these most unusual natives. Their blackness is their most noteworthy feature. They are negroes with a jet black complexion and the dark wooly hair characteristic of their race. Even the animal skins with which they clothe themselves are black. Considering their polar location one might have expected them to use the skin of the polar bear, like the one already encountered by the Jane. They are well armed with heavy dark wood clubs and black flint spears. The bottoms of their canoes are equipped with large black stones. This somber hue seems to encompass them entirely.

Invited aboard ship for a closer look, they readily accept the crew, even though they seem to evidence a strong aversion to their fair complexions. Pym concludes that they are the first white men the savages, as he is already

calling them, have ever seen. About the Jane they seem to have an intense curiosity, though Pym could not help but think some of Too-Wit's, the chief's, antics over the ship's "wound" somewhat affected. This shrewd observation, though, he seems to forget. It is also noted that while on board they will touch nothing white--neither flour, nor eggs, nor the sails. This oddity the crew finds "impossible to understand".

Ever concerned with the practical side of his mission, Captain Guy, to the annoyance of Pym, decides to remain on the island for a week while provisions could be taken on and arrangements made to procure the biche de mer and tortoise for export. Despite the lack of a common language the trading arrangements have gone so well that another visit to the somber and desolate village is made by the crew. In spite of the amicability shown on all sides, no precautions are neglected. The bloody events that follow will reveal again the horrible discrepancy between appearance and reality. With great care the savages have devised a well-laid plan to rid themselves forever of these white skinned visitors. Their apparent friendliness was but the result of a cunning and treachery seldom surpassed.

The ensuing explosion kills and buries all but Pym and Peters, who at that very moment happened to have stepped into a fissure to gather some nuts. The force of the explosion buries them deep within the mountain. The horror of their condition is only too intensely felt by Pym. "Living inhumation" is that old Poe bugaboo and Pym, who has already undergone its terrors once before while deep within the flanks of the Grampus, must suffer yet again.

It is Peters who initiates a response to their predicament as he suggests that they attempt to find out what has happened. So confounded is Pym that he has scarcely an idea of what to do. With much struggle, they are able to make their way up a newly-opened passage into the open

air. Once free of their immediate confinement the awful reality is only too apparent. Under a cloak of friendliness and hospitality the natives had been engaged in the most brutal treachery. It is the natives of Tsalal who have engineered the devastating avalanche that claimed the lives of all but Pym and Peters. They emerge to find the attack on the Jane about to commence. Overwhelmed, she is taken and sacked. The ensuing destruction sets off an explosion which causes, in addition to much violence and death, the strange white animal, found earlier and preserved, to be thrown up on the shore. This causes as much panic among the natives as does the explosion itself. After imprisoning the carcass they flee inland screaming "Tekeli-li, tekeli-li". Neither Peters nor Pym can make any sense of it.

Having escaped from a living inhumation their fate is yet uncertain. They are the last white men on this island of blackness and brutal terror. Hunger forces them to explore their mountain prison to see what can be made of their situation. Up to now Peters has been eclipsed. He has offered no comment on the decision to push further toward the south. He has surfaced only to kill the threatening Arctic bear. While on the island he rises to a stature of great importance. Without his help, Pym would have perished. Surprised by a large black bird Pym is too startled to make any movement. It is Peters who acts quickly to capture it and, thus, save them from immediate starvation. And again in exploring one of the island's strange caverns, it is only the "ingenuity and resolution" of Peters who saves Pym from a headlong descent. In a chillingly realistic passage we see Pym so immobilized by his terror that his fear of falling changes, inexorably, into a longing to fall. It is Peters who catches and saves him, but here we have been offered another insight into the imaginative capacities of Pym. In the terrifying intensity of his desire

Pym reveals the power of the imagination. The lure, for Pym, is the plunge into oblivion. It is an expression of the mind's desire for unity, to escape the separateness of its individuality. Pym's impulse here is more dramatic, but it is the same urge that drove him from the safe shores of Nantucket. With almost uncontrollable passion Pym repeatedly plunges into his fate. Repeatedly he denies the call of reason and accepts the possibilities of discovery. But he is saved in the strong arms of Peters. Peters' last decisive appearance comes with a surprise attack by the natives. The ensuing events force them and a captured savage out to sea in the remaining canoe. Once again at sea Peters reassumes a secondary role.

The remaining adventure is Pym's. Experience has shown that, however contrary to popular belief, ice lies behind them to the north and not before to the south. So it is that they "resolve to steer boldly to the southward" as Pym has wished to do. Their canoe is frail, but they do what they can to render it more secure, receiving some help from the captured Nu-Nu, who exhibits the strange habit of screaming "Tekeli-li" on seeing a white surface. He will do nothing towards setting a sail. They travel southwards towards they know not what. With increasing speed the tale rushes towards its conclusion. Pym again notices that "very strong current continually" set towards the south. It will grow until it reaches a "hideous velocity". He is certain that they must have covered a vast distance. It is evident that they have entered into a new region unlike any known before. Strange new occurrences surround them. The water which had been too warm to contain much ice grows steadily hotter until it is impossible to touch. As well, there is a distinctive change in its color and texture. No longer transparent, it becomes increasingly milky both in its hue and consistency. Gray vapors, flickering on the surface, steadily loose their grayness.

As they are hurtled forward, a fine white powder resembling ashes begins to settle upon them. Nu-Nu has become progressively more inert. The appearance of a white handkerchief causes shudders and convulsions which are accompanied by continual "Tekeli-li" screams. They attempt to learn from him what might have been the islanders' motive in destroying the crew. In reply he can only display his teeth. These, to Pym's amazement, are black. Nu-Nu can bear the oppression no longer and so sinks and dies. Peters, too, has grown apathetic. Even Pym experiences a sudden sort of listlessness. They neither urge the boat forward nor impede its progress, but are simply carried along into this chalky world. Before them rises a cataract or curtain both huge and luminous which seems to offset the darkness that hovers over them. Overhead flies a huge white bird screaming the continual "Tekeli-li". Head on they meet the white vision. It is neither welcoming nor forbidding. Thus ends the narrative of Pym's most unusual voyage.

Whether intrigued, confused, or annoyed, the reader is nonetheless haunted by the white figure. Eagerly one scans the note hoping it will offer some clue as to what has become of Pym. The appendix to the tale is far from conclusive. Pym has suddenly and mysteriously died, and the remainder of his manuscript is presumed lost. Peters is alive but curiously cannot be met with. He apparently has written no account of the experience. Even more unsettling is the discovery that one (possibly Poe) connected with the narrative maintains a general "disbelief in the entire truth of the latter portion of the narration". Despite such skepticism, it is evident that the editor takes the journal seriously and would have us do so as well. He is even, perhaps, a bit too earnest. It is this editor who provides us with the information about the chasms which we could not be expected to know. Taken together, the geologic configurations

form the Ethiopian verbal root "to be shady". The characters in the fourth figure form a composite of the Arabic verbal root "to be white" and the Egyptian word for the "region of the south". Peters' observation that the most northerly character is a human figure pointing to the south seems to be corroborated. From there the anxious editor goes on to link the cry "Tekeli-li" with both the natives--horrified as they encounter white--and the bird issuing from the white curtain-like substance. He goes on to suggest that possibly Tsalal, the name of the island, might have added significance. The observation is well sustained when one remembers Pym's likening the pronunciation of the name Tsalal and its ruler Tsalemon with the hissing sound characteristic of the black bittern Peters was able to capture on the island. The editor also highlights the opposition of black and white. The island is a somber region harboring no white thing. To the south lay only the continual white that Nu-Nu finds so frightening and debilitating. We have clues, but clearly we are being asked to consider again this journey which has brought us to such mystery.

It is in the haunting appeal of the white vision that the tale holds much of its power. It is a perfect enigma. It is the color chosen for brides and the christening of newborn babes, but also the hue with which we clothe those ghastly apparitions that haunt and terrify the imagination of men. As Melville observed in writing of the whiteness of the whale "there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood".³⁵ The white takes hold and will not let go. We hardly notice the blood red eye or scarlet fangs of the animal encountered before reaching Tsalal. Blood has flowed throughout the tale but its violence and treachery pale in the glare of the white-shrouded figure. Ishmael speaks of the color's "elusive quality" and, perhaps, herein lies its hold on us and its fittingness as a conclusion to this most probing journey. Not

bound to a single meaning, this pale shade carries with it a wide range of possibilities. It offers both comfort and fear, joy and horror. For a well known object its impression is strong and clear; but in a strange and unknown situation the hue's very indefiniteness is a source of terror. It can speak of eternal reward and eternal obliteration. Science tells us it is no color and all colors. Its meaning, then, as Melville suggests, may be all meaning and no meaning. This is the real horror that Pym confronts now in the frail canoe just as it has been ever since he pushed away from Nantucket's safe, secure shores. This ending, then, as unsettling as it may be, carries home the fruits of the voyage. Pym never sought security and safety; rather, he sailed away from its smothering embrace. It would have been fate's worst trick to have sent him scurrying back to those welcoming shores. On the contrary, fate has urged him forward to find what he may. Passively, perhaps, but clearly acceptingly, Pym goes forward into that unknown whiteness.

The whiteness is elusive and indefinite. Richard Wilbur has observed that for Poe the sequences and situation of his tales are always concrete representations of states of mind.³⁶ So here the whiteness with its elusiveness and indefiniteness takes on the force of an actuality and represents a concrete state of mind. The vision is Poe's representation of the unknown within man. Pym's going forth to meet the vision is his acceptance of that unknown and his willingness to confront it. Edward Davidson has called Pym's narrative "a study of the emerging consciousness".³⁷ Pym has passed through terrors and come to self-knowledge. The journey has been his initiation into self-awareness, self-consciousness. The white vision is the representation of that state.

At the portal of this ever whitening sea stands the black world of Tsalal. It must be encountered and escaped from if one is to meet the

possibilities of the white vision. It is the final stage in the descent into self-knowledge. The island is a world of total depravity. Here man exists at his most basic and primitive stage. Like whiteness, reason and highly developed consciousness have no place on the island. The people are governed by taboos, not logic. Captain Guy, ever practical and logical, is crushed beneath its weight and force both literally and symbolically. Pym, too, is stunned by its force; though aided he is able to survive. Only Peters, the former mutineer, is able to confront the blackness on its own terms. As the white is the realm of the unknown, the possible, black is the embodiment of the limitation to man's knowing. The natives know nothing of white and so they fear it. These white men who propose to sail into that sea of ever growing whiteness fill them with a fear and loathing dramatically depicted in the panic and consternation with which they flee the strange white animal thrown ashore by the explosion on the Jang. To guard and protect their ignorance no action seems too drastic.

The polarity between black and white is a recurrent image in these sea tales. The author of the manuscript found in a bottle, as he makes his fateful plunge, is surrounded by "ramparts of white ice" and enveloped in the "blackness of eternal night". For the Norseman caught in the fury of the maelstrom, the "high, black, mountainous ridge" of ocean and ebony walls of the vortex are offset by the "ghastly radiance" of the moon and surf. And again in Pym's narrative black stands at the very threshold of the white vision. It is, perhaps, here that the connotations inherent in the colors are most apparent. As a color, black absorbs all visible light waves and reflects nothing. The black world of Tsalal is that world that takes in all human experience and reflects nothing of that experience. It learns nothing and guards that nothingness, that ignorance. Tsalal is an island--land. It is Nantucket reduced to its most depraved

level. Nantucket did not willingly send Pym to face the possibilities of his voyage. It did all it could to hold him there. The natives, more brutally, but just as ineffectively, try to hold him back. Just as he had rejected his grandfather, so does Pym destroy the remaining canoe, leaving both to futile protestations from shore. Black is the ignorance from which man must escape if he is to meet the possibilities for discovery.

We see now Pym's journey in a new light; we see more clearly his reasons for going. Augustus sought adventure; Pym sought something more mysterious and metaphysical. We see now that it was knowledge of the self. For Pym, then, the essential voyage was the journey of the spirit, the imagination. This is the real Pym and the real subject of his sea yarn. His imagination sent him forward and will interpret his experience. The voyage was important because men must be wrested away from safe, secure harbors if they are to gain new knowledge. All of Poe's sailors gather their knowledge at great personal peril, but once firmly set on that voyage each stands by the validity of the experience--no matter what the cost.

Important though Pym's experiences are, it is not so much what happens to him as the way in which he responds that is important. An imaginative, susceptible boy, Pym entrusts himself to the care of his friend Augustus whom he credits with experience, skill, and practicality. Pym wanted to go, but it is Augustus who puts the plan into effect. Pym approaches the problem imaginatively, Augustus intellectually. Where Pym gives great credence to vague premonitions and suspicions, Augustus reacts logically and rationally, deciding what and how it must be done. In his excitement to be off, Pym has failed to note how Augustus' practicality fails when he surrenders to his liquor. Nor does Pym anticipate any weakness in Augustus' plan to board the Grampus. He

trusted everything to logic and common sense. Their vulnerability is one of the things he will learn on this monumental voyage.

Already we can see a pattern emerge. Pym's journey is another of Poe's probing explorations into the multi-faceted psyche of man. Pym is the imaginative, the interpretive, even the poetic spirit which is lodged within us all. He acts without knowing the reasons; indeed, the reasons seem superfluous. Augustus, on the other hand, embodies the intellect. He is all planning and organization. Yet his skill and ideas, persuasive though they may be, are not, as we have seen, without flaw. He surrenders to drink but knows not that he is impaired and, thus, imperils their lives. Augustus' actions throughout his portions of the tale, are revealing. He has agreed to arrange for Pym's undercover boarding of the Grampus. He plans meticulously for every conceivable eventuality. So well has he seen to all the details that in taking possession of his box Pym is enchanted. All would be fine were it not for the inconceivable, the unexpected. In such a violent overthrow of logic and disorder as in the mutiny, Augustus is powerless. His own life is at the mercy of the crew, and there is no way of acquainting his buried friend with what has transpired above deck. He is only able to survive through the intercession of the swarthy Peters.

With the appearance of Peters, Augustus' role, like his physical condition, goes into a steady decline. In the retaking of the brig, Augustus is grievously wounded. The evil and chaotic forces prove too much for him. Through the terrible torments inflicted by the elements, he weakens. Hunger and thirst take their toll. Finally, in a pitifully weak condition, he dies. Augustus has done for Pym what he could, but he is no match for the disorder that everywhere takes hold. He could plan for anticipated needs, but the illogical defeats him. Augustus,

like Poe's other seafarers, makes the arrogant mistake of assuming that life, that nature can be predicted and, thus, controlled. He was relying on past experience to anticipate the events of the present. It is a mistake avoided by Dupin, the greatest of Poe's ratiocinators, in, for example, "The Purloined Letter". There he understands and identifies with the dark forces represented by the Minister D. and the orangutan in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" and, thus, solves mysteries unfathomable to the Prefect of Police who logically reasons from past knowledge and experience. Not being able to enter into a world view that fails to respect the workings of reason, Augustus is powerless to face the challenge posed by the mutiny and is, thus, cut off from the voyage into self-knowledge. The illogical in Poe's view is that part of life which cannot be understood, but the ability to attune one's self to this view is the capacity for self-knowledge.

Pym, ever the ingenué, is still in need of assistance. That dependency he places on the hybrid Peters. Peters is dark and one of the original mutineers and had, thus, participated in the original butchery and treachery. So anxious are Augustus and Pym to have a confidant that this is overlooked. Peters is described as simply being "among the less bloodthirsty of the party". And fortunate it was for them that Peters came to the fore. Without him they could not have survived. They would not have been able to retake the brig. Later it is he who makes repeated efforts to dive below deck to secure what food and tools are available. With Augustus too weak and Pym in a swoon it is Peters who stabs Parker. Again and again he rises to center stage when acts of strength and force are required. He saves the crew of the Jane from the attack of the white bear. He rescues Pym from a burial on Tsalal, from a fearful plunge, and an attack by natives. Peters and his strength are indispensable throughout. But as close as they are, there is never an exchange of ideas such as Pym

shared with Augustus. Among the two it was the younger Pym who listened avidly to Augustus recounting his few sea exploits. Of the more seasoned Peters this same Pym asked nothing. Peters rescues Pym from the unexpected, from predicaments which threaten and menace. He provides a bulwark against the chaotic forces which assault. But for direction or shape to the voyage Peters can add nothing. Even when alone with Pym in the frail canoe he withholds any and all comment and opinion. As he had with Augustus, Pym looks elsewhere for shape and direction for his ideas of exploration and discovery.

With Augustus gone it is to Captain Guy that Pym turns. He will provide the ship and the idea to explore the South Pole. Captain Guy makes possible what Pym had been dreaming just as Augustus had put into effect his initial dream of a sea voyage. Captain Guy looked upon his voyage in a practical and pragmatic fashion. He is primarily engaged in trade and commerce. When he comes to the idea of exploration he adopts it enthusiastically, but is just as willing to set it aside when practical matters intervene--scurvy, shortage of fuel, weather, etc. Pym, being much less practically inclined, gives those considerations short shrift and uses his influence to urge Captain Guy onward. Augustus, too, had gone to sea for logical reasons--adventure--and so made plans to take his friend along.

On arriving at the island of Tsalal, Captain Guy takes all the sensible precautions. Only a limited number of natives board the Jane at any one time. When they go to the village, care is taken to keep the group from being separated and their muskets are ever ready. But the unexpected overwhelms him. These seemingly guileless natives have plotted the most vile treachery. He and his crew are totally overpowered and destroyed by the black, sliding rubble. Only Pym and Peters, no

strangers to violence and treachery, are saved.

Pym is once again abandoned. He and Peters are the only white men on the island. Again Pym is no match for his situation. Despite all his experience he remains the novice. While on the island he is continually too startled, too overcome, too stunned to take any effective action. With Captain Guy gone there is no one he can turn to for direction but the swarthy Peters. Captain Guy, with his pale skin and inability to fathom the depths of treachery, had been totally foreign to the island; Peters is no such alien. His dark skin and experience in violence (the mutiny) give him at least a link to this island of blackness. And so it is once again the powerful Peters who will save Pym from the terrors of the island, the islanders, and from Pym himself. It is Peters who captures the black bittern, Peters who wards off the attack of the natives, and again Peters who saves a Pym seized by the terrors of his imagination as he hangs upon the precipice. On the island Peters is utterly indispensable, but with the destruction of the second canoe he slips back into obscurity. The ever whitening sea is a new terrain and he comes unprepared for its challenge.

This most southern sea belongs to Pym and Pym alone. He has wrested himself from the embrace of the security of a well-ordered and well-reasoned life, battled with the terrors of isolation, struggled against the forces of treachery and triumphed over the assaults of the elements. He has pushed back all the terror and obstacles that have kept him from the looming white vision. The vision will neither welcome nor impede him. Having come so far the knowledge seems owed to him. The current now aids him. The awesomeness of the environment mutes his earlier enthusiasm so that he enters the final experience in a listless condition. But never is there a thought of going back or even merely avoiding the encounter.

Subdued but willing, Pym plunges into the whiteness.

He returns; he lives to write the tale. He tells us that he survived the whole experience by nine years, and though filled with "events of the most startling and, in many cases, of the most unconceived and inconceivable character", he gives these subsequent years scarcely a mention. The truly significant portion of his life has been his first sea voyage. To this he returns in its entirety. The immediacy of his tone suggests the strength of its presence in his consciousness.

Pym's unfortunate accidental death has the effect of breaking the narrative rather abruptly, but not, however, in midstream. What once seemed a middle can now be understood as an end. As David La Guardia has noted, "Poe could have had a conclusion to satisfy seekers of logic and order as he had the ability".³⁸ The narrative's ending, then, is a conscious authorial decision and reflects the care Poe exercised over the totality of this longer-than-usual narrative. Harry Levin has called the conclusion "unsatisfying" but observes that "the termination of our own existence is equally unsatisfying".³⁹ This sense of frustration which haunts the closing paragraphs does much to bring home the truths embedded in that white apparition. Pym lives just long enough to get the tale told. The abruptness and unsatisfaction are integral. The suddenness of the termination has the effect of throwing us back upon the vision we no more than glimpse at the very moment that Pym himself slips from view. Pym has escaped from equally terrible predicaments before. In a sense he does escape from this one. But as noted earlier it is not so much what happens to this boy as the way in which he responds that holds our attention. The manner of his escape and even the fact that he survives tell us very little. It is his accepting response to the white vision that seizes the reader's interest. The realistic aspects of the voyage are allowed to

drift away. Long discourses on stowage, laying-to, biche de mer, and the penguins take on new meaning. "The stowage is important in that it is the unconscious of this particular society (the ship) . . . It is no wonder that this ship has trouble, having such a disordered stowage; it is the self or society with a disordered unconscious . . . which breeds mutiny, murder, and cannibalism."⁴⁰ If the ship is to be secure the cargo must be well organized and arranged in its place; likewise an unconscious in disarray can scuttle the journey to self-knowledge.

Other documentation, such as the laying-to, the rookeries, the biche de mer, besides appealing to the popular interest in the nautical materials that Philbrick pointed to, also form part of the pattern of contrast cited by Daniel Hoffman: "Passages of nightmarish terror are followed by lucid expositions of natural phenomena".⁴¹ In the midst of the mutiny Poe discusses the intricacies of laying-to; just before the terror at Tsalal he speaks of the mutual arrangements of the fierce albatross and the gentle penguin. It is as if animals have achieved what men cannot. Such alternation, as reflected in his style, Hoffman considers as characteristic of the multiple nature of Poe's mind. For Pym, as for Poe, the essential voyage is that of the imagination. This is a voyage of the spirit and as such reflects Poe's continuing interest in the divisions within man.

Poe nurtured the concept of a tri-partite division within man. Edward Davidson observes that for Poe man was a creature "formed of three separate yet interacting parts: body, mind, and spirit".⁴² Poe himself, in his "Poetic Principle", speaks of dividing the psyche into its "obvious" distinctions, "Pure Intellect, Taste, and Moral Sense". "Just as the Intellect concerns itself with Truth so Taste informs us of the Beautiful while the Moral Sense is regardful of Duty."⁴³ Davidson has noted that life in Poe's view "consists in the disjunction of the sides of the self.

Various elements in the human psyche or being are forever at war with each other."⁴⁴ War might seem too strong a term to use here, though we see throughout the narrative the polarity between the various sides of the self. Pym, the motivating force in this tale, is quite clearly likened to the spirit, to the imagination, to the sense of taste--call it what you will. His is a search for the beautiful. He has no objective reasons for going and Duty would, on the contrary, have bade him stay. The beauty of his search is, Poe tells us, "no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us--but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above".⁴⁵ So we have it --Pym's attempt to capture the Beauty above and beyond. Put another way, it is Harry Levin's notion of Poe's struggle for "posthumous consciousness".⁴⁶ For this Pym has endured terrors and sufferings--to catch a glimpse of what is beyond. That glimpse is effectively captured in the looming white shrouded figure.

But the imagination is a frail creature and cannot go long unaided in a world of harsh realities. It turns first to its intellectual counterpart to help it through the maze of terrors which menace its vulnerability. So Pym, the ingénue, fired only by a vague desire to be off, turns to his more rational companion. Augustus' clever planning attests to the strength of the mind and its indispensability in a world of obstacles. Pym seems not to notice that of itself the mind can fail. It can become the victim of conditions of which it remains unaware. Unbeknownst to either boy, Augustus is intoxicated when he urges them to take to the sea in the Ariel. Though he intuitively "knew" it should not be done Pym allowed himself to be swayed by the force of the intellect. Augustus was experienced so Pym shut his eyes to the danger. But these are not the only dangers which threaten the resourcefulness of the mind. There are outside forces which it cannot control. Augustus, like his father, who is another rational and

practical figure, is overwhelmed by the chaos released by the mutiny. Against such violence their reasonings offer little support. Nor can Augustus survive the torments which follow. He sickens and dies, and his loss, while mourned, is not regretted. For some time Augustus has been useless. His place will be taken by Captain Guy. But Captain Guy soon goes the way of Augustus. He is no match for the cunning depravity of the islanders. He, too, is overwhelmed and destroyed. The intellect and the powers it gave these characters offered much to Pym. It carried him from the insulated and protected safety of Nantucket to the very threshold of a "vast and exciting field for discovery". It is doubtful that that the imaginative but unskilled Pym could have come so far unassisted. But the intellect is not omnipotent. It may carry one to the edge of discovery but not beyond. That imaginative leap must be made by Pym alone. Even the trustworthy Peters is excluded from that final experience.

Peters comes to the fore as Augustus is shackled. He survives the voyage because he is no stranger to violence. He is not a victim of the mutiny because he is a participant in the bloody deeds. It is principally his force that retakes the brig just as it is he who does most to insure their survival once the elements have taken their toll. For this sort of violent world he is admirably suited. Peters is purely physical. The only plan he has throughout the tale is to take the Grampus to the South Pacific and let come what may. It is really no plan at all and never again does he make a suggestion as to what they should do beyond the immediate predicament. But as a representative of the body he is superb. His powerful limbs and ferocious face suggest the resources on which time and again Pym will rely. Without Peters Pym would most probably have perished on board the Grampus. He would have died the ingénué with only limited growth beyond what he was in Nantucket. Just as Augustus and Captain Guy were essential to the voyage in providing both the means and even the germ of the idea so also

was Peters indispensable to its fruition. When the intellect failed the body would sustain him. But reliance on Peters, on body, on instinct is equally limited. When all others have gone and they are left alone in the frail canoe Peters can add nothing. In this new environment he sinks into apathy. He, too, survives the adventure but inexplicably cannot be met with, nor apparently has he communicated anything to others. Peters simply has no tale to tell. For him it has been a perhaps peculiar escapade but merely one out of a life of such incidents. For Peters the adventure is a literal one, and Poe lets him slip from view. Pym's more spiritual quest is the subject of the narrative.

"A Descent into the Maelstrom"

In a letter to James Lowell, July 2, 1844, Poe listed his favorite works, and among these he included "A Descent into the Maelstrom". That he should have done so is no surprise. Certainly the tale has much that is distinctive of his art and outlook. There is the horror of nature in fury and the terror of the individual caught in its grasp. There are the rhythms of blackness and whiteness, deafening sound, terrifying depths, and dizzying heights. It was a tale with an immediate and powerful effect. In short, unlike the more ambitious Narrative of A. Gordon Pym, it was successful on many levels as evidenced by the fact that it has been frequently anthologized. At the same time it is a tale that has often been overlooked by sophisticated commentators.

Unlike his other voyagers, the Norseman in "A Descent into the Maelstrom" is a professional man of the sea--professional in that he and his brothers seek to master and exploit the sea, to turn it to their personal advantage. They are not lured by vague premonitions of awesome encounters, nor drawn into their wanderings by jadedness and skepticism. They were simply fishermen, and like all fishermen, they were determined to reap the benefits of the sea, only perhaps a little more greedily than their brethren. Inevitably, though, the tale takes on those disturbing reverberations of meaning that so enliven Poe's other tales of maritime wandering.

From a field for harvest, the sea becomes again an arena in which men contend with the elements and with themselves. It took but a single day--rather six deadly hours--for the narrator, a man of vigour, to wither. He survives to tell his tale, but as a man broken in body and soul. The hair which changed from black to frosty white is but the most visible sign. His countenance is so altered that his daily companions fail to recognize

him. The contest is followed by the ordeal of the mariner's climbing of the steep and slippery Helseggen to tell again the tale of his six terrible hours. As is the case with Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, those hours will not let him go, nor, it seems, the man to whom he tells his story.

To tell the tale it is necessary for the narrator to climb the mountain and view the maelstrom in all its fury. No cozy spot by a tavern fire, no chatting with the busy wayfarers beside the road will do. He must tell "the whole story with the spot just under your eye". We can only speculate about the power in the old man's voice and eye as he drives his timorous companion up the steep slope. The mariner is determined that he wants his listener to do more than intellectually grasp the tale. Poised on the precipice, looking down at the fury that rages below him, deafened by the noise and wind roaring around him, every moment fearing for his life, the narrator experiences in a graphic way the descent of the mariner into the maelstrom. Moreover, this narrator uses the suggestive powers of language, unpossessed by the simple fisherman, to bring alive for us the experience of the vortex. Through art the narrator seeks to make the fictionalized descent immortal.

In the mariner, who is suddenly imperiled, helplessly buffeted and whirled about, we see again the mind of man isolated and adrift amidst hostile forces that threaten to overwhelm it at every moment. In the mariner's escape from these external forces far stronger than himself are the seeds of the mind's own escape from the dangers that menace from without and within. Inseparably linked to its powerful and arresting story of a nautical mishap are these truths discovered by a mind unafraid to push out from safe havens. This moral is fundamental to the tale. As Jay Halio has demonstrated,⁴⁷ Poe was a very moral writer. "Poetry," Poe wrote, "has nothing to do with either morality or truth, not because these

are unimportant but because it is not in the poem that they are best treated".⁴⁸ That would seem to discourage a search for moral truth among his tales. But he says elsewhere that poetry "is not forbidden to moralize --in her own fashion. She is not forbidden to depict--but to reason and preach of virtue".⁴⁹ And so it is that within these tales we are not argued, pushed, or cajoled into ideas and theories about the human psyche, but rather, threaded through the currents of these turbulent seas are the experiences--moral, intellectual, and emotional--of the mind adrift on an uncharted course.

Poe's voyager in "A Descent into the Maelstrom" makes his first appearance as a weak and winded old man atop the Helseggen. We see him only after the confrontation that has brought about such a sharp degeneration in him: "You suppose me a very old man--but I am not". He was, as the tale illustrates, until a short while ago a hale and hearty seaman given to exploits of courage and skill--ventures with "the risk of life standing instead of labor, and courage answering for capital". These three brothers were an ambitious crew. The choicest fishing grounds lay beyond the dreaded Moskoe-strom. Other fishermen avoided this place, preferring the safer coves closer to home. With cunning and skill, the brothers bested the currents time after time and gathered in a single day what often took the others a week to harvest. That the brothers were aware of the risks involved is clear in that they would not permit their sons to accompany them despite the great help they could have been. To accomplish the deed they needed both courage and skill, courage in that they had but a scant fifteen minutes to cross the deadly channel and skill and knowledge of the currents to tell them when to make the rush. But on this day the mariner's watch fails and the brothers find themselves bearing directly on the Moskoe-strom while it boils in full fury. They had taken no precautions;

everything had seemed fine--"the oldest seaman among us could not have foreseen what was to follow". Nevertheless, they are totally overwhelmed. Around and around they whirl. The younger brother is lost immediately; the other two clutch and cling at anything that offers a shred of safety. Assaulted by speed and noise, the Norseman is disoriented. But as was the case in Poe's other sea tales, despair gives way to a sense of the wonder in his predicament. With the last shreds of hope for personal safety crushed against those glistening ebony walls he looks out at the force, power, and even beauty of the chaos swirling about him and he begins to take a careful view of what is happening. It is then that he makes his observations about cylinders and is saved.

As such the tale seems to stand as a testament to the resourcefulness and strength of the mind--its ability to extricate itself from situations which are seemingly beyond it. Many have seen such confirmation in the tale. For Harry Levin, the tale shows "a mind able to exert control over matter".⁵⁰ Daniel Hoffman sees the mariner's escape as "due solely to the exercise of the ratiocinative faculty when in the relentless grip of a catastrophe".⁵¹ Another commentator sees the sailor's release as due to "the counter forces of reason and imagination".⁵² Yet is it reason that saves him? Instinct rather than thought saved him initially. Can it be said that rationality frees him finally? It seems not. In addition, though he lives, he has not escaped the grasp of the maelstrom as is seen in the way he continues to drag listeners up the steep Helseggen.

Nonetheless, he lives and his brother does not. The elder brother's actions are few, but they do help to set off the character of the protagonist. It is the elder brother who first names the terror that lies ahead. We notice him again as he comes forward to wrest away his younger brother's hold on the ring bolt. There is room for only one, and

in his paroxysm of terror the elder can think only of himself. With great pity in his heart the mariner takes up the rejected water cask. Ironically, this becomes the means of his own escape. We again see the elder brother just as the younger is about to cut himself loose and save himself.

Whether or not he can understand the younger's pleading it is difficult to determine, but he refuses to move and so plunges headlong into the chaos. The elder brother remains a prisoner of his fear, and so perishes. Blood ties matter little to him in his ordeal. He would force even his brother from whatever safety he had gained for himself.

The younger brother, on the other hand, transcends his anxieties. Despair and grief give way to wonder and awe. This recalls the feeling of the author of the "MS Found in a Bottle". He, too, was overcome by the "utter hopelessness of hope" and so prepared himself "gloomily for that death which I thought nothing could defer beyond the hour". Similarly, Pym, aboard the storm-tossed Ariel, with the drunken Augustus, sees clearly the horror of their predicament. Having done what he could to ease their plight, "I recommended myself to God and made up my mind to bear whatever might happen with all the fortitude in my power". The whole of Arthur Pym's narrative is an acceptance of his despair. His imaginings upon his intended voyage are fearful. He envisions no reward, however insignificant, but rather a lifetime dragged out in isolation and desolation. Having done what he could to ease his plight, he recommends himself to the powers that be and resolves to bear whatever might happen with all the fortitude in his power. Despair is an almost tangible fact for Pym as it is for the two brothers in "A Descent into the Maelstrom" who whirl about at sense-defying speed.

But unlike the elder brother in "A Descent into the Maelstrom" who remains locked within his despair and so perishes in the grip of terror,

Pym and the Norseman, as well as the nameless author in the "MS Found in a Bottle" move beyond despair, beyond a desperate clinging to personal survival, and so achieve an illuminating insight that takes away the sting of obliteration. Each unexpectedly turns to embrace the experience: "A curiosity to penetrate the mysteries of these awful regions predominates even over my despair, and will reconcile me to the most hideous aspects of death". This curiosity totally alters the complexion of the MS writer's experience. The episode is a just and fitting culmination to his ceaseless, skeptical wanderings. Pym survives, and looking back on the pain and suffering which he has felt, he still values his experience: "While, therefore, I cannot but lament the most unfortunate and bloody events which immediately arose from my advice, I must still be allowed to feel some gratification at having been instrumental, however remotely, in opening to the eye of science one of the most intensely exciting secrets which has ever engrossed its attention".

This acceptance of their fate is essential to an understanding of Poe's sea characters, and to the possibility of self-revelation that lay at the bottom of each of these sea voyages. This acceptance by the characters of their fates is followed by their turning outward, by their renewing the bonds of community they had heretofore spurned. Both the MS's author and Pym had renounced familial and communal claims. The Norseman and his brothers, too, were men set apart. They alone ventured across the feared channel. But once their uniqueness had been surrendered to the power and beauty of nature the way was open for illumination, revelation, and escape. For the Norseman, awareness comes within the jaws of the maelstrom. Inexplicably freed from the shackles of anxiety, he begins to look around and sees things in a new light.

I began to reflect how magnificent a thing it was to die in such a manner, and how foolish it was in me to think

of so paltry a consideration as my own individual life, in view of so wonderful a manifestation of God's power. . . . After a little while I became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself. I positively felt a wish to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make and my principal grief was that I should never be able to tell my old companions on shore about the mysteries I should see.

He is overtaken by a "new sense--a new entity", similar to that which had so altered the soul of the author of that MS found floating in a bottle. Like the first of Poe's seafarers who had resolved to transmit a journal back to the society he had so steadfastly fled--"I will not fail to make the endeavour"--the Norseman's first urge is to share his experience and his insights. He and his brothers had worked for themselves, but after his ordeal, he can think only of others.

This aspect of Poe's moral design is at the heart of the tale. Now freed from egoism, the mariner looks around. This state of wonder, this condition of transcendence beyond self is not usually the best state for rational reflection. "Never shall I forget the sensations of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me." Now a part of the whirl, he begins to watch. With trial and error he begins to see that cylinders make the slowest descent and would, thus, be less likely to be absorbed into the fury and chaos raging below. To be sure it was his mind which made the observation, but it was a mind stripped of the 'rational' concern for its own survival. It is the work of a mind imaginatively attuned to the poetry and beauty of nature. Even so, it is not sufficient to merely observe nature. The true illumination that he seeks requires one further step. The Norseman is already in the cylindrically shaped water cask, the one abandoned earlier by his brother, but this is lashed to the ship. The whirlpool, nature, life all demand that he cut himself loose and plunge into the chaos. He cannot conquer it; he cannot master it; he must join forces with it. Imaginatively he must link himself with the fury. Like

Dupin in "The Purloined Letter", he must enter into the evil and work with it to fathom its mysteries. He must acknowledge the evil within himself. It is as Stein said to Jim in Conrad's Lord Jim:

A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns. . . . The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up.⁵³

And so it was that in submitting himself to the whirlpool, the mariner was saved. In acknowledging and surrendering to nature's awesome power and beauty he was reborn, reintegrated into a new and fuller life, just as in Moby Dick Ishmael enters into the darkness and violence of life and survives. Melville's sailor was drawn into the fearsome power, the fearful potential for evil as well as into the tranquil and majestic beauty of that snow white hump. Similarly, out of Ishmael's loving union with the savage, Queequeg, comes his insight into the truth of the whale as well as into his own survival on Queequeg's coffin-turned-lifebuoy. As in Poe, it is not reason that saves him but an imaginative union with the whole of nature.

What was it, though, that had died? What was it that had heretofore separated him from nature and his fellows? What sort of man had the mariner been? The Norseman and his brothers were professional seamen, but they stood apart, separated from the like of others by the extent of their skill and daring. Others were more cautious, more willing to acknowledge the power of the vortex, less likely to think that that power could be circumvented. Not so cautious, not so awed by the maelstrom, the brothers made each expedition "a matter of desperate speculation", setting out to master the sea's fury and to reap its harvest. They approached the maelstrom cerebrally, as a problem to be solved. Reason acquainted them with the ebb and flow of the tide. The gauntlet of the maelstrom could be

run but only at the quarter hour between the ebb and flood. So, believed Poe, did science attempt to explain the fury and to contain it. Watches and mechanical devices endeavoured to channel nature. The mind observed nature, formulated laws, and then expected that nature would adhere to those laws.

Thus, with their knowledge and instruments, the brothers, while nervous, are confident of their success. Nature, even in all its fury, is seemingly understood and manipulated by the mind of man. The brothers, in their mastery, set themselves over nature and apart from their fellows. They, thus, stand guilty of intellectual pride and arrogance. The mind which makes possible their individuality and their superiority has led them to too vast a confidence in themselves. In their pride they had reached too far, and in the vortex these claims of reason are seen as "paltry" and insignificant. In the vortex, also, the mariner gives up his individualism and goes back to the community of men and to a respect for God's power in nature.

The realization of the limits of the mind's power and of the value of an imaginative harmony with nature is reflected in the narrator's preface to his rendering of the Norseman's adventure. His experience mirrors the mariner's for in a sense, he, too, descends into the maelstrom. Through his involvement he comes to know the folly of trusting too completely in ratiocination and learning. To better convey the truth of this encounter he turns not to the language of science but to that of the imagination. To the scientific accounts of the maelstrom with which he as an educated man was familiar he gives short shrift and "smiles at the simplicity" of this version of reality. In its ability to render the impression, the scientific sense of the phenomenon is "exceedingly feeble". Its attempts to explain and define the maelstrom "however conclusive on paper become

altogether unintelligible, even absurd, amid the thunder of the abyss". To make the account as valid for us as it was for the mariner aboard his whirling ship and for himself atop the Helseggen, the narrator turns to impressionistic language. Where Jonas Ramus refers to the impossibility of describing the howling and bellowing of animals trapped in the vortex, the narrator brings these sounds alive in his vivid description of the "appalling voice, half shriek, half roar, such as not even the mighty cataract of Niagara ever lifts up in its agony to Heaven" and in his image of the "moaning of a vast herd of buffaloes upon an American prairie". The maelstrom yields to simile and metaphor and surrenders to a sympathetic rendering of its power, but steadfastly resists the efforts of science to define and contain it.

The mariner refers to the maelstrom not as such but as the Moskoe-strom. As Gerald Sweeney has observed,⁵⁴ it is a subtle but important distinction. Maelstrom is a technical term meaning "that which grinds". As a term it seeks to explain what takes place between Lofoden and Moskoe. It attempts to tell what happens and what does not. In being thus defined, it offers the mind a kind of power to cope with it. But as has been seen, the mind is not equal to the fury and is, in fact, there revealed as a "paltry" thing. Attempts to define the chaos are, then, worse than useless. For the Norwegian it is the Moskoe-strom, a phenomenon that takes place near the Moskoe island. It points to a location, but does not tell what happens and as such acknowledges the ungraspable power of nature. Even the very naming of the islands was a futile gesture on man's part in the mariner's later view. The mind's every effort to come to intellectual and rational terms comes to nought. Similarly, the attempts to understand and then predict nature's movements are fruitless. The watch on which the Norseman and his brothers had relied failed, and its failure delivered

the mind a helpless victim to that which it had sought to control. In addition, nature is mercurial; even the most seasoned seaman would have been taken unawares that day. The mariner is, basically, a simple man. It is from the school master that he learns the names of the shapes of cylinders and spheres with which he explains his observations. In the whirl the terms were unimportant. What allowed him to rise again was abandonment of self-interest and admiration for the power and beauty of nature.

The companions who rescue the sailor do not know him, and cannot believe his story. That the narrator does believe the mariner's story is clear from the tale. Poe has so constructed his tale that no response to the mariner's last comment is needed. We see the narrator's acceptance in his imaginative identification with the wonder of the whirl and in his intuitive acceptance and use of the Norwegian's term *Moskoe-strom*. The descent of the mariner clearly symbolizes for the narrator the descent of the human psyche into the nether side of life, into that part of life which does not operate according to logic and reason. This part of life, illogical though it may be, is insistent in its demands. Despite man's best efforts to skirt it, he will be drawn in to face the chaos and beauty of that truth.

Poe cites the observation made by Joseph Glanville in 1676 that "the ways of God in nature, as in Providence, are not as our ways nor are the models that we frame any way commensurate to the vastness, profundity, and unsearchableness of His works, which have a depth greater than the well of Democritus". Nature's plan (if one can speak so of a fundamental force that shuns the operation of logic and moves according to its own design) cannot be comprehended by reason, cannot, thus, be controlled and manipulated by that reason for its purpose, but can, rather, be impressionistically grasped, imaginatively understood. If the mind surrenders its claims and

seeks to confront nature, 'alogical' life, unconscious life on its own terms, a new domain of beauty and truth is revealed to him. This Poe understood and made real in his tales. True understanding of life is to be gotten imaginatively. Poetry, the language of the imagination, is, then, the handmaid of truth.

While the imagination in these sea stories is the essential element in the human psyche, it cannot act alone. The imagination opens the paths to new knowledge, but the mind through ratiocination must articulate and integrate these discoveries with the rest of life. Just as Pym, the embodiment of the imagination cannot triumph alone, so the mariner, if he is to rise again must use the whole of his being.

CONCLUSION

And so it is that the sea tales of Edgar Allan Poe affirm the wholeness of the human personality. Unlike Roderick Usher, cloistered within the crumbling walls of his mansion and his spirit, Poe's mariners are saved from disintegration. On the ocean's vast uncharted currents they carry their guilt, their fears, and their obsessions to the limit. In plunging directly into these terrors the sailors are able to ride through them, to move beyond the shackles of these obsessions and so glimpse for a brief moment the possibilities that lie beyond concern for the self. The suprapersonal possibilities inherent and made manifest in the voyage save the sailors from destruction by revealing the potential for psychic liberation in the loss of the self. And yet in 'losing' the self the mariners come to a fuller understanding of that self.

In these tales Poe was able to touch and stimulate the emotional patterns adhering to the universal ideas of sea, initiation, quest, birth and death, individuality and community. The shifts and currents of these patterns carry home the truths of the voyages, for it is the account of the inner experiences of the mariners that give life and vitality to these nautical tales rather than any portrayal, however documented, of happenings in the external world. And this is why as Kathleen Sands suggest the ending of Pym is so perfect.

This is Poe's masterstroke, for whatever might be contained in the "lost" chapters is surpassed by the imagination of the reader. Subtly, he has drawn us into the rite itself, for amazing as Pym's experiences have been, they are familiar to the subconscious of all men.⁵⁵

For Poe, for Pym, and for the other mariners the essential voyage has been that of the spirit. Thus an ending so unsatisfying to a rational perspective "becomes a symbol of ultimate illumination".⁵⁶ It is an offering of

possibility. The white-shrouded figure is neither welcoming, nor comforting, nor forbidding. It is a suggestion that something is there, perhaps good, perhaps not. For some it may be an immortal God or, more simply, ultimate meaning--the notion that there are values beyond rational and pragmatic concerns. The real source of terror connected with Poe's premature burial motif is that, locked in suffocating darkness and powerless to effect any change, the victim comes to the terrifying realization that there may be nothing else:

The blackness of darkness which envelopes the victim
the terrific oppression of lungs, the stifling fumes
from the damp earth, unite with the ghastly considerations that we are beyond the remotest confines of hope, and that such is the allotted portion of the dead, to carry into the human heart a degree of appalling awe and horror not to be tolerated--never to be ~~conceived~~.

Pym

That long, narrow, stiffling, black box becomes a symbol for Poe of all man's fears that there is no meaning, no value to this existence. Pym survives these living inhumations and sails further into the self to grasp at the hints of meaning. The Norseman, too, in "A Descent into the Maelstrom" descends deep into the bowels of the earth, but there he quickly surrenders to the power of nature, and he finds new value to life, a value independent and indifferent to individual claims but satisfying and significant nonetheless.

The Norseman acquires no material, no rational gain from his voyage but he, like the other Poe sailors, emphatically stands behind the consequences of his voyage. For a "broken" man the climb up the steep Helseggen cannot be easy but the truth he has to share gives him stamina and vitality. His insight into the truth is the value of his experience. For the sailors these were voyages of initiation. Their rites of passage led them to realms of truth more universal than they had known before.

In its broadest conception, the initiation myth denotes the stages of an inner journey, not merely the education of the young into the skills of life. The events of the rite are symbols of a mental and spiritual growth which eventually delivers the initiate into the knowledge and wisdom of his society.⁵⁷

The rite may be repeated at a higher level for a select few leading to a position of shaman or seer. This, Kathleen Sands suggests, happens in the second part of Pym's narrative. In addition, one notes this in the experiences of the author of the "MS Found in a Bottle" and in the Norwegian fisherman in "A Descent into the Maelstrom". They undergo intense levels of separation and isolation, of purification, and of return to society--the stages of progress in the initiation ceremonies.

There is a clear movement in the three tales from innocence or ignorance of these matters to knowledge and experience. For each of these men the start of their initiation comes with an awareness of "the inability of the rational faculties to supply answers to those critical areas of existence where answers are demanded".⁵⁸ Each of the sailors experiences the limits of his mental powers. The learnedness of the narrator of the "MS" leads only to skepticism and equally futile wanderings. Augustus' account of exciting adventure cannot satisfy the longings of his friend, Pym. And the Norseman sees himself and his claims to existence as paltry and insignificant. The mind prepares them for their discoveries, but of itself it cannot make the leap to a higher level of purpose, of value, of truth.

In keeping with Romantic theory, the truths the mariners grasp are private and tentative. Romantic poets rejected the systemized and objective truths of earlier ages. Their conquests were solitary and their truths individual. As shamans and seers these mariners offer not a gift of truth but a signpost for that journey. This sort of initiation was also typically American in the view of R. W. B. Lewis:

The proposition, implicit in much American writing from Poe and Cooper to Anderson and Hemingway, that the valid rite of initiation for the individual in the new world is not initiation into society, but given the character of society an initiation away from it: something I wish it were legitimate to call "denitiation".⁵⁹

The values embodied in these voyages lead not to a fuller participation in the life of society but to a rejection of that society. Each of the mariners turns to the sea and accepts its landlessness, wherein, as Melville says, resides the highest truth. The safety of the initiate soul as with Pequod lies in scorn and flight from land and the values of landed society.

And so it is that Poe's mariners are very special heroes. The heroes of an age, Auden notes, can tell us much of that era--its outlook and views on life, its values. And the nature of the heroic role of these mariners incorporates much of what Poe was trying to say. These were not exceptional men as were the classic heroes of old. They stand apart, but through their inclinations rather than any extraordinary gifts that they possess. Others may not even notice their special qualities (Pym, for example, was an ordinary boy to those around him). Nor are they the sort of heroes Auden calls ethical⁶⁰ who possess a special grasp of truth or knowledge. As a result of their experiences they become more like religious heroes in that they possess an absolute commitment to the truths they have discovered. But they are religious heroes with a Romantic coloring. They are solitary men, relatively antisocial who have no rational expectations of being happy. This, Auden suggests, is a dramatic disjunction with the past. Classical heroes were clearly social beings admired by all. A decline in such admiration reflects a decline in their status. Likewise unhappiness suggested either that they had yet to become heroes or had ceased to be one. Romantic heroes, on the contrary, expected to be unhappy, to be dissatisfied with the complacencies of life. Poe's mariners were heroes in this sense. They came to reject the complacencies of life as lived by

most men--totally ensnared by rational concerns. They stand outside of and opposed to the values of society in general. And yet they are heroes admired by those for whom the quest for self-knowledge and transcendence of self is the meaning of life.

This meaning can be seen to lie in the unity and integrity of the human personality. There is a struggle against division that takes place in many of Poe's tales. Characters like William Wilson, Roderick Usher, and Prospero live one-sided lives. In their atrophied condition they weaken and die. So also do these mariners labor under a compartmentalized worldview that is narrow and exclusive. They respond to the promptings and urgings of one side of their beings allowing other claims and viewpoints to weaken and perish. Herein lie the seeds of their destruction. In allowing differing sides of their being to perish from disuse the mariners seem confronted by either death as was Roderick Usher or the sterile life of a Montresor who, despite fifty long years, remains locked within his self-defeating and segmented worldview. But the mariners take these guilt, fears, and obsessions to the sea. In the sea's vast possibilities they confront the fullness of life and are saved from destruction, saved from dissection.

As W. H. Auden and Thomas Philbrick have demonstrated, the sea was a great Romantic and American preoccupation of the nineteenth century. In the sea's ability to dissociate itself from the values of landed and civilized society, in its impermanence and flux, in its inability to be constrained and controlled the sea in itself was able to project the isolation and precariousness of the individual whether adrift in the physical environment or tossed between the claims and counterclaims of the psyche. The sea would test the sailors to the limits of their beings revealing to them the fullness of their beings. In suffering the torments of hunger and

thirst Pym learns that the mind is one with the body. Corporal needs affect the mind and its workings. The crowded conditions and stifling fumes of Pym's below deck confinement join with hunger and thirst to so disorient him that he is suddenly incapable of rational action. He impulsively drinks the last of his food and fails to examine the other side of the note. In their terror, in the fear for their lives, their bodies, each of the sailors comes to a fuller understanding of the claims of the body, the importance of the body in his survival and in his thinking. In Pym's narrative this relationship is explored most fully. Time and again the imaginative Pym is saved by the cunning representative of the body, Dirk Peters. Without him Pym could hardly have survived. Neither can the mind remain indifferent to physical claims and needs.

But the sea is more than a physical challenge. As a complex and conglomerate symbol it demands the active participation of the entire personality. On previous occasions we have noted the sterility the mariners discover in their rationality, their practical and logical concerns. The sea in its awesome beauty and terror reveals to the sailors both the insignificance of their existence and the wonder of nature. This discovery is best expressed in the excitement and eagerness with which they continue the experiences which had so recently held them in a terror so great that each gave himself up to gloomy despair, and in the strength of the commitment with which they turn outward to their fellowmen. Despite the consequences, whether to others, like the crew of the Jane, or to themselves, as in the toll exacted from the Norseman, each of the mariners stands in support of his voyage. Each surrenders himself not in a death wish but in "a Romantic desire to penetrate the ultimate secret".⁶¹ Like Melville they know it is better "to perish in that howling infinite than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety". Safety

in such a situation would be the triumph of the body over the other claims of the psyche. Here rational concern for the safety of the body gives way to imaginative possibilities for new illumination, new joys, and new meanings. It is in the fullness of their now united personalities that the mariners learn a new regard for the beauty of life and so live, even if briefly, in the fullness and joy of a united personality. It is only the Norseman that we see actively returning to a life among men. For him it is a kind of life-in-death situation similar to the life of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner once returned to shore. Having accepted the truths of landlessness, they live on shore as alien men. In the eyes of the world there is no 'happy' end to their voyage. Yet to the mariners, newly reborn in the beauty of nature and the fullness of community among men, there is great joy--more than they have ever known.

Psychic division was reflected in Poe's society. Nineteenth-century America was rushing headlong into a civil war, the results of which threatened to be as disastrous as the collision between Madeleine and Roderick Usher. The clash was to reach its climax in the decade after Poe's death. The nation was coming apart. It argued over slavery, over state's rights, and over differing modes of and views on life. In simple terms the rational, intellectual, pragmatic, and industrialized North sought to impose its will and values on a more genteel, emotional, and affective South. For Poe, with his aristocratic pretensions, the South, like the imagination, was the home of the nation's finer aspects. He, of course, overlooked the obvious inequities. Negroes were systematically excluded from participation in these finer things, but then, as has frequently been observed, Poe was no democrat. In "Tamerlane" he speaks of the "rabble men"(1.159) and remarks in "The Colloquy of Monos and Una" that among "other odd ideas, that of universal equality gained ground". But

democratic theories aside, the South, as opposed to the North, was a slower more genteel world less subject to the ravages of industrialization with its crowded cities and scarred landscapes. As the nation was to discover, however, neither was able to exist alone. The North in four years of armed struggle managed to impose its will much as the author of the "MS" was able to suppress the more affective side of his being under a weight of skeptical studies. But real peace did not come to the nation until certain claims of the South could be recognized as valid and honoured. True reconstruction began only as the values of each view were acknowledged. Likewise, spiritually, it was only in the unification of the separate faculties that Poe's mariners came to the joy of their "exciting Knowledge".

FOOTNOTES

1. Herman Melville, Moby Dick (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1964). p. 148-9.
2. Harry Levin, The Power of Blackness (New York: Alfred Knopf and Co. Inc., 1958), p. 25.
3. Daniel Hoffman, Poe (New York: Doubleday and Co. Inc., 1972), p. xli.
4. Richard Wilbur, "The House of Poe" in The Recognition of Edgar Allan Poe: Selected Criticism since 1829, ed. Eric W. Carlson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1966), p. 258.
5. Patrick Quinn, The French Face of Edgar Poe (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), p. 193.
6. Hoffman, p. 264.
7. Patrick Quinn, p. 200.
8. Ibid., p. 196.
9. Thomas Philbrick, James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 166.
10. Ibid., p. 123.
11. Ibid., p. 168.
12. Ibid., p. 175.
13. Richard Levine, "The Downward Journey of Purgation: Notes on an Imagistic Leitmotif in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym", Poe Newsletter, II, 2(April 1969), 29-31.
14. Philbrick, p. 176.
15. W. H. Auden, The Enchafed Flood (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), p. 6.
16. Ibid., p. 11.
17. Ibid., p. 12.
18. Ibid., p. 63.
19. Ibid., p. 68.
20. Edgar Allan Poe, "MS Found in a Bottle" in The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1965), II, p. 2. All subsequent references to Poe's work will be from this edition.

21. Allan Tate, "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe" in Edgar Allan Poe: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 40.

22. Floyd Stovall, "The Conscious Art of Edgar Allan Poe", College English, XXIV (March 1963), 418.

23. Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 54.

24. Edgar Allan Poe, "Tales Twice Told" in The Complete Works, XIII, p. 153.

25. Hoffman, p. 151.

26. Marie Boneparte, The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation (London: Hogarth Press, 1949), p.350.

27. Bodkin, p. 54.

28. Sidney Kaplan, "Introduction" in The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym (New York: Hill and Wang Inc., 1960), p. iv.

29. Arthur Hobson Quinn, Edgar Allan Poe: A Critical Biography (New York: Appleton-Century Co., 1942), p. 263.

30. Poe's other long piece of fiction, "The Journal of Julius Rodman", also dealt with exploration and travel, specifically the Lewis and Clarke Expedition, and reflects his awareness of this trend. See Harrison, Complete Works, IV, p. 9.

31. Arthur Quinn, p. 268.

32. Boneparte, p. 291.

33. Hoffman, p. 274.

34. Levin, p. 118.

35. Moby Dick, p. 254-5.

36. Wilbur, p. 250.

37. Edward H. Davidson, Poe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 174.

38. David La Guardia, "Poe, Pym, and Initiation", New Approaches to Poe: A Symposium, ed. Richard Benton (Hartford: Transcendental Books), p. 82.

39. Levin, p. 125.

40. Richard Levine, p. 30.

41. Hoffman, p. 50.

42. Davidson, p. 195.
43. Poe, "The Poetic Principle", Complete Works, XIV, p. 273.
44. Davidson, p. 202.
45. "The Poetic Principle", XIV, p. 273.
46. Levin, p. 131.
47. Jay Halio, "The Moral Mr. Poe", Poe Newsletter, I, 2 (October 1968), 23-4.
48. Poe, VII, p. 43.
49. Ibid., XI, p. 71.
50. Levin, p. 106.
51. Hoffman, p. 134.
52. Robert Shulman, "Poe and the Powers of the Mind", ELH, 37(1970), 252-3.
53. Joseph Conrad, Lord Jim (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1957), p. 230.
54. Gerard Sweeney, "Beauty and Truth: Poe's 'A Descent into the Maelstrom'", Poe Newsletter, VI, 1 (June 1973), 24.
55. Kathleen Sands, "The Mythic Initiation of Arthur Gordon Pym", Poe Newsletter, VII, 1 (June 1974), 16.
56. G. D. Thompson, Poe's Fiction: Romantic Irony in the Gothic Tales (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), p. 183.
57. Sands, p. 14.
58. La Guardia, p. 83.
59. R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 115.
60. Auden, p. 92.
61. Thompson, p. 182.

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