# The Sea Tales of Edgar Allan Poe

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A THESIS
in
The Department of
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
Sir George Williams University
Montreal, Canada

October, 1973

## Abstract

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The three sea tales of Edgar Allan Poe present in fictional form many of the concepts (particularly those of the expanding and contracting universe) which are worked out more fully in Eureka. Poe also tends to explore devices used elsewhere in his stories, notably the perversely irresistible plunge into the abyss. The images of the fall and the circle, central to all three tales, are foci for the examination of man's place as one of the particles caught in the fate of the cosmos, a fate which is predetermined, mathematically precise, and terrifying. The tales are not resolutions in the way in which Eureka tries to be, however. Rather, they show intermediate stages--characters who have crossed the boundaries of ordinary reality, yet who cannot reveal Truth through supernal Beauty. The voyages are necessarily incomplete stages in the final revelation of the interdependence of creation and destruction.

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# I

If one accepts the thesis that Edgar Allan Poe wrote an elitist brand of literature (that is to say, only those with sufficient sensitivity and acuity of perception could understand the real import of a work of art), the technique of the "hidden" tale would seem to be implicit in all his prose works--and particularly in the sea tales for the purposes of this analysis. There exist two parallel structures in the narratives: the actual voyages undertaken by the victims form the superstructure, while the significance of everything they endure lies in the internal framework. The superstructures, or "plots", are the external evidence of the inner workings of the spirit. Moreover, all these plots tend to have a Chinese puzzle effect--or tale-within-a-tale.

In "Maelström", a fisherman tells of an incredible adventure, which is passed on to the reader by a fictional narretor; in "MS. Found in a Bottle", a fictional narrator writes a fictional manuscript which is presented in the form of a tale. A similar, though more elaborate structure is evident in the Narrative of A. Gordon Pym[1] with the "Introductory Note" and concluding "Note" in which a fiction is presented as truth disguised as fiction.

[1] Edgar A. Poe, "A Descent into the Maelstrom," "MS. Found in a Bottle," Narrative of A. Gordon Pym, in The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe (New York: Random House Inc., 1965).

The reason for the apparent disjointedness of what really are well-integrated tales lies in Poe's attitude to the concept of plot. "In the construction of plot, for example, in fictitious literature, we should aim at so arranging the points, or incidents, that we cannot distinctly see, in respect to any one of them, whether that one depends from any one other, or upholds it. In this sense, of course, perfection of plot is unattainable in fact,--because Man is the constructor. The plots of God are perfect. The Universe is a Plot of God."[2] The plots of Poe are imitations of that greater Plot; hence, the narratives relate both structurally and philosophically to Poe's cosmogony.

The reader, for his part, must assume the role of detective, the "analyst": "He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics . . . ."[3] One wonders in his discussion of draughts whether the parties involved are not Poe and the reader, and the game, the piece of fiction presented. The description of the game resembles the structure of the sea-tales, particularly Pym: "In draughts, on the contrary, where the

[2] Edgar A. Poe, Marginalia, in The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1965), XVI, 10.

[3] Edgar A. Poe, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," in The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe (New York: Random House Inc., 1965), p. 141.

moves are unique and have but little variation, the probabilities of inadvertence are diminished, and the mere attention being left comparatively unemployed, what advantages are obtained by either party are obtained by superior acumen." ("The Murders in the Rue Morgue", p. 141). The game then is not merely to uncode the fiction, but to attain a vision of "supernal" reality.

Although Davidson indicates character development in Pym, the philosophical drift of the novel does not allow Pym, ". . . to see himself by means of some cosmic comparative."[4] Poe's narrators offer the reader the "cosmic comparative" but they are limited in their visions by their participation in the action. To participate in the act of eternal creation (and implicit destruction) requires total self-absorption. It is a triumph of the individual intellect to survive, yet it is a spiritual failure, a lack of courage in grasping out for Unity.

Davidson avoids this problem by deftly shifting his interpretation from the symbolic to the sociological: "At the very end, however, Pym could never come back from Antarctica because he had undermined so many of society's rules. . . ."[5] In fact, Pym returns--as

[4] Edward H. Davidson, Poe: A Critical Study (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1966), p. 167.

[5] Ibid, p. 166.

he consistently turns and returns throughout. Although in "MS.", the philosopher-narrator is consigned to his fate, his manuscript bears back the fact of a continuing existence--even if in a bottle. And of course, the old fisherman of "Maelstrom" survives as well. The return in some form is a technical necessity; without the return there is no tale on the one hand and, on the other, description of total absorption is physically impossible. Even the narrator of "MS." can only convey the approach, not the arrival. Moreover, the very act of communicating implies separation rather than unity. Unity is either overwhelming silence or a "shrieking din" that deafens the victim to all but its approach.

Pym never really goes anywhere but retreats instead to a private world. It is for this reason that Pym acts amorally and unsympathetically; the other characters and settings are his projections. The evidence for this lies in the increasingly personal nature of the symbology and the fact that Pym's voyages complement his expectations (in mood, if not otherwise) of the sea-faring life. "My visions were of shipwreck and famine; of death or captivity among barbarian hordes; of a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown . . . . I regarded them only as prophetic glimpses of a destiny which I felt myself in a measure bound to fulfil." (Pym, p. 757)

While less specific, doubt is cast upon the physical truth of the shorter tales as well. In "MS." the centre of the story is marked by a shift from the past to the present tense and by the narrator's linking of his environment and his soul.[6] The fisherman in "Maelstrom" admits that his story--and even his identity--is subject to disbelief by his peers.[7]

Pym's growing knowledge of sailing could be seen as an indication of development but, it would seem more likely that the significance is Pym gaining control of his dream. A later writer, H. P. Lovecraft in The Dream-World of Unknown Kadath, also shows that part of the relevance of the dream pertains to how the character learns to manipulate the world he has created.

Yet, even when Pym is entirely in control of the vision (at the end, he paddles his own canoe), there is no evidence whatsoever that he understands his function. Indeed, it is questionable if any of the narrators have this capability. Even the fisherman who comprehends the action cannot see the significance of his participation. All the narrators are trapped and bound; with the exception of the fisherman, they have no mobility--or only future mobility.[8] Symbolic and structural

[6] See "MS.", p. 122.

[7] See "Maelstrom", pp. 139-40.

[8] See David Halliburton, Edgar Allan Poe: A Phenomenological View (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 249.

patterns in the narratives indicate interior passage and change, but not in terms of heightened comprehension. Bezanson describes Pym's environment as, ". . . a world in which meaning is most nearly captured in sudden tableaux or dream pictures, marked by visual intensity and highly charged with emotion."[9]

Poe tends to have a peculiar relationship with his reader. Always the story is an image released by the author to inform and involve the reader. He is expected to dissect and perceive with Blakean vision the meaning that is beyond verbal expression. Because only some are capable of this insight, the characters and situations are only believable to the "discerning".

There is an interesting parallel between Poe and medieval art forms. The medieval religious painter did not concern himself with the technique of perspective, possibly because a realistic portrayal was irrelevant to the moral implications of the scene. In narrative form, the same principle operates in the dream sequence in which structure depends on symbolic, rather than realistic, logic or action. Neither is Poe attempting to conform or portray external reality, or even convincing human relationships. The presence or absence of a character does not depend on necessities of plot

[9] Walter E. Bezanson, "The Troubled Sleep of Arthur Gordon Pym," in Essays in Literary History, ed. R. Kirk and C.F. Main (New York: Russell and Russell, 1965), p. 153.

so much as on the underlying function it serves. To read Pym, for example, as a poorly executed sea-saga is to ignore totally the interdependence of form and meaning in Poe's work and the philosophical basis of everything he wrote.

Ultimately, all Poe's literary efforts are stages in a voyage to Eureka.[10] Poe's limitation as an artist coincided with the power of his vision. The philosophical stance in Eureka cancels all human effort or significance. Juan Luis Borges, a twentieth century writer, would probably see Poe as a man trapped in his own labyrinth--as indeed Pym is trapped in his own world, or in his view of the world. Because Poe's was a narrow, deterministic and essentially materialistic philosophy, contemplation of the infinite entrapment in cycle eliminated all other thematic possibilities.

O'Donnell also notes the inescapable link between the philosophy and the fiction: "Between the unanswerable question and the unquestioning answer we have the rhythm of the work of Poe; at one extreme, an infolding: the terror of annihilation, the embrace of self and monomaniacal concern with the preservation of identity, the probing and dissecting of inner reality; at the other extreme, an unfolding: the quest for personal unified field theory, the searching of

[10] Edgar A. Poe, Eureka, in The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1965), XVI.

the universe for incontrovertible evidence that no soul is greater than his own, the clipping and pasting of a cosmic reality."[11]

Pym is the victim--and the creator, since of all particles and collections of particles, only man is sentient--of the labyrinth of cancellation. Each sequence in the narrative has its complementary action and symbology, with this exception: each episode is further removed from any pretense to reality. The action moves between two poles, two opposites; for example, Pym suffers and then is rescued only to suffer again and similarly.

Although "Maelström" and "MS." have less complex structures, the same movement is evident. The fishing smack in "Maelström" does not head directly into the whirl, but approaches in "swings and jerks". The narrator of "MS." rides both the heigths and depths of his mysterious ocean, though never necessarily to a conclusion. Even if the characters never understand the vision, the reader is moved by stages towards a conclusion that is the interstice between (-1) and (+1). It is the reader for whom the revelation develops.

Yet it is Pym--or the narrator/philosopher--or the fisherman, who is caught in a cycle, that is infinite. Personal awareness is a breathing space between

[11] Charles O'Donnell, "From Earth to Ether: Poe's Flight Into Space," PMLA 77 (1962), 86, col. 1.

destruction and creation; it is the gasp after birth and the last before drowning. Indeed, birth and death are merely different aspects of the same process, both aspects containing elements of terror, of pain and a kind of salvation.

## II

In order to discuss the imagery employed in the sea tales, one must assume a structural frame for the narratives. The symbol of the journey, the quest, has a central position in all literature. In these tales--but most completely in Pym--Poe attempts to elevate the journey to cosmic significance; that is, the experiences of the narrators are representative of all species of matter inescapably caught in universal motion. Daniel Hoffman comments upon this: "The universe itself, like Arthur Gordon Pym, is in, or rather is, an endlessly repeated series of motions, alternately voyaging outward from its own centre and rushing inward thither again. . . ."[12]

Traditionally, the vessel is the soul launched on its voyage through life, or eternity. Richard P. Adams observes also that, "In Moby Dick and The Ancient Mariner, the chief metaphor of death and rebirth is the ocean voyage. . . ."[13] "MS." adheres to this formula for the most part, with the ship representative of human drives and the sea, the environment through which it struggles. However, in "Maelstrom" somewhat, and overtly in Pym, Poe adds a peculiar Jungian twist.

12 Daniel Hoffman, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe, Poe (New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1972), p. 139.

13 Richard P. Adams, "Romanticism and the American Renaissance," American Literature, 23 (Jan. 1952), 422.

The sea is not only eternity; it is also the half-apprehended awareness of the cosmos, a primeval intuition, a race consciousness. The characters of the shorter tales[14] have some human elements in their make-up, but like Pym they perform less as individuals so much as a collection of responses to the universal conflict in which they are involved. They perceive and report but cannot comprehend.

The stormy waters of the tales carry the narrators out of norms of time and space. One might note how often Pym's watch runs down in the hold of the Grampus. After the simoon, in "MS.", the narrator logs that, ". . . we had no means of calculating time, nor could we form any guess of our situation." ("MS.", p.121) In "Maelström", time betrays and in a sense abandons the fishermen: "I dragged my watch from its fob. It was not going. I glanced at its face by the moonlight, and then burst into tears as I flung it far away into the ocean. It had run down at seven o'clock! We were behind the time of the slack, and the whirl of the Strom was in full fury!" ("Maelström", p.134) Time rushes ahead as it were, to await the sole survivor on the other side of the Ström. "I found myself . . . above the spot where the pool of the Moskoe-ström had

[14] The peculiar arrangement of the double narrator in "Maelström" will be discussed later.

been. It was the hour of the slack. . . ." ("Maelstrom" p.134) For one of the brothers however, as for the old Swede and ultimately one suspects the narrator of "MS.", awareness of time has stopped.

An introversion is therefore enforced; if passage outward is prohibited, there remains but one possible path. Moreover, the destinies of the participants adhere to the ships--or states of mind--they inhabit, and abandon. Bezanson notes one particularly striking image in Pym's accident with the Ariel; Pym is seen as ". . . an apocalyptic vision of the self, spread-eagled against the hull, nailed to the copper sheathing, and drowned again and again."[15]

The fishermen brothers of "Maelstrom" have a slightly different perspective than the other narrators. Rather than misplacing their trust in their vessel, which is after all only a "schooner-rigged smack", they depend on their judgment of the winds and weather--and timing. Their confidence resides in primitive wisdom and courage rather than in the creations of human intelligence (i.e. ships). Halliburton observes: ". . . the relationship of victim and victimizer, of man and nature, is rarely direct. Some object--some physical thing made by human beings--insinuates itself between them. . . ."[16]

[15] Bezanson, p. 155.

[16] Halliburton, p. 247.

Indeed it is intuitive reasoning, or "mere instinct" that saves one brother, while the other is doomed by intellectual panic. One might note the pride with which the old man tells of the way they had customarily avoided destruction: "We never set out upon this expedition without a steady side-wind for going and coming--one that we felt [my italics] sure would not fail us before our return--and we seldom made a miscalculation upon this point." ("Maelström", p.132)

The elements, always untamable yet usually at least predictable, finally trap the fishermen. Immediately the folly of clinging to the appendices of the vessel becomes obvious: ". . . our masts went by the board as if they had been sawed off--the mainmast taking with it my youngest brother, who had lashed himself to it for safety." ("Maelström", p.133) The ultimate survivor however, adopts a posture indicative both of submission and supplication, by throwing himself "flat upon the deck". But it is not a yielding to the will of the seas; rather it is to the boat. Unlike most of Poe's vessels, whose destruction is curiously in accordance with the will of the currents, this particular little boat seems imbued with the spirit of the Perverse, almost choosing the time of her destruction. It is this disharmony between motion

and the moved that makes her untrustworthy: ". . . the little boat gave herself a shake, just as a dog does in coming out of the water, and thus rid herself, in some measure of the seas." ("Maelström", p.133) In the grip of the whirlpool, she seemed ". . . to skim like an air-bubble upon the surface of the surge." ("Maelström", p.135) And finally, despite its indecisive "swings and jerks", it seems to rush into the funnel in an unmistakable fit of perversity.[17]

More soberly than the boat which flirts with its fate, the fisherman ". . . felt a wish to explore its [the Ström's] depths" and observes his plight as ". . . a manifestation of God's power." ("Maelström", p.135) While he neither clings to the insanity of hope, nor does he lapse into hysterics. Rather, his intellectual functioning resembles that of Dupin's (and Poe's) cross-word puzzle mind; like Dupin, he seems to possess, "The necessary knowledge . . . of what to observe." ("Murders in the Rue Morgue", p.142) In this case, the observation is that of abandoning the perversity of the ship for the stability of the water cask. Daniel Hoffman sees the same intellectual operation "Yet, as we are fascinatedly drawn toward the vertiginous lure of this funnel in the sea, we become aware that it is not only Nature enacting the pattern of its own

[17] See "Maelström", p. 139.

ulterior motive . . . . It is also exactly that lure toward which the Imp of the Perverse within propels us. The energies of the created world are in this image fused with the energies of the psyche, both being subject to the same laws. . . . And his [the fisherman's] escape is due solely to his having exercised the ratiocinative faculty when in the relentless grip of a catastrophe."[18]

Conversely, the man of reason and "rigidity of thought" in "MS." becomes, like Pym, an emotional captive of the ships he rides. However, to discuss the ships of this tale, one must first refer to the time structure involved. Poe would seem to have manipulated the sequence of events in the Biblical Creation for the purposes of the tale. The narrator logs that, "We waited in vain for the arrival of the sixth day--that day to me has not yet arrived--to the Swede never did arrive." ("MS.", p.120) The protagonist is marooned then in time, on the fifth day of a kind of anti-Creation.

In Genesis, the event of the fifth day is: "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life . . . And God created great whales. . . ." The first part of the Biblical quote could be tied to the nature of the second vessel

[18] Hoffman, p. 139.

which is linked in the narrator's mind with "an apothegm of an old weather-beaten Dutch navigator": "It is as sure . . . as there is a sea where the ship itself will grow in bulk like the living body of the seaman." ("MS." p.123)

The ship then is a part of Poe's totally animate universe and the eternal ebb and flow of the particles of that universe. This is not to give the ship sentience; rather it is to stress the integrated relationship amongst the atoms of the ship, the men--including the narrator, and the natural environment of sea, and rocks. The ship is the whale, the physical evidence and instrument of the hand of God--or fate--moving the destinies of all things. It is the "moving creature" and simultaneously a function of universal movement. Here one might compare a passage from Eureka: "The Thought of God is to be understood as originating the Diffusion--as proceeding with it--as regulating it--and, finally, as being withdrawn from it upon its completion." (Eureka, p.238)

The sixth day does not arrive because on that day were created creatures of the land. "God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea. . . ." (Genesis I, 28) In the geography of this antithetical world, the land is flooded, the only

variation being the barren "ramparts of ice" ("MS.", p.125) observed towards the end of the voyage.

While one cannot avoid the reference to Genesis, one must also note that the setting is not Eden. Rather than birth and vigor, the atmosphere of decadence and decay increases from the outset of the voyage. The narrator, like most of Poe's protagonists, is "haunted" by a "nervous restlessness". The beauty and strength of the first ship is betrayed by its stowage which "was clumsily done and the vessel consequently crank". The narrator's mind is, of course, in a similar condition--contemplative, yet "deficient in imagination". ("MS.", p.118)

This ship must be abandoned by the narrator because it shares the nature of the fisherman's little vessel in "Maelstrom" in that it resists aging and destruction. It is made of "Malabar teak" ("MS.", p.118), ". . . a very durable hardwood which contains an essential oil which resists the action of water and prevents the rusting of iron in contact with it. The heartwood is resistant to termites."[19] It is in every sense, the opposite of the second ship.

The hurricane isolates the narrator both in time and space, as before noted, but it also begins a social alienation as the ship is literally "swept" clean of

[19] The Columbia Encyclopedia, 3rd ed. (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 2103.

characters, with the exception of the narrator and an old Swede. Insofar as the ship is concerned, "The framework of our stern was shattered excessively and . . . we had received considerable injury." ("MS.", p.120) The scenario then consists of a "rigid" mind, an elderly man, and a dilapidated ship struggling towards their individual fates. While the wind and water writhe together, the sun also exhibits symptoms of senescence: "The sun arose with a sickly yellow lustre, and clambered a very few degrees above the horizon--emitting no decisive light." ("MS.", p.120)

The narrator refers to the storm as a "simoon"--normally considered a sandstorm of North Africa--and again after the suhset he observes, "All around were horror and thick gloom, and a black sweltering desert [my italics] of ebony"--an unusual textural description of a gale. The point Poe would seem to be making is that land and sea combine in chaos; in the combination however, there is only sterility and no life, nor hope of regeneration. Also, the storms while violent, are also erratic and appear as images of disintegration and instability: "There were no clouds apparent, yet the wind was upon the increase, and blew with a fitful and unsteady fury." ("MS.", p.120) While possessing a frightening capacity for violence, the storm is curiously impotent: ". . . the colossal waters rear their heads above us like demons of the

deep, but like demons confined to simple threats, and forbidden to destroy." ("MS.", p.124) Even the narrator's companions on this last voyage are elderly. "The ship and all in it are imbued with the spirit of Eld." ("MS.", p.125)

One must closely examine one particular feature of this second ship. "There is a peculiar character about the wood which strikes me as rendering it unfit for the purpose to which it has been applied. I mean its extreme porousness, considered independently[20] . . . . It will appear perhaps an observation somewhat over-curious, but this would have every characteristic of Spanish oak, if Spanish oak were distended by any unnatural means." ("MS.", p.123) The question that arises here is--is the porousness that of a cork--or a sponge--or both? The "cork oak" is native to the Mediterranean region, so perhaps it is that tree of which Poe is thinking.

To examine the first possibility, if the ship is indeed the cork in the bottle, one might say that the narrator and the manuscript are one and that the story itself is the bottle. On the other hand, the ship is also a sponge of human history and lives. "The cabin floor was thickly strewn with strange, iron-clasped

[20] Poe is careful to separate these two images, because I suspect the porousness has to do with the theme of re-absorption or re-unification whereas the "worm-eaten condition" contributes to the atmosphere of decay.

folios, and mouldering instruments of science, and obsolete long-forgotten charts." ("MS.", pp.124-25) Again, ". . . in scrutinizing . . . her severely simple bow and antiquated stern, 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." ("MS.", p.123) "We walk about, amid the destinies of our world-existence, encompassed by dim but ever present Memories of a Destiny more vast--very distant in the bygone time, and infinitely awful." (Eureka, pp.311-12)

"Growing in bulk" with time and the seas, the ship is soaking up the real and symbolic oceans, its swelling presence dominating the blackness of the void in which the narrator finds himself and becoming full of the destruction which will release a new Creation. "On the Universal agglomeration and dissolution, we can readily conceive that a new and perhaps totally different series of conditions may ensue--another creation and irradiation, returning into itself--another action and reaction of the Divine Will." (Eureka, p.311)

Unlike the fisherman of "Maelström", the narrator of "MS." is completely integrated--which is to say, self-imprisoned--in his environment. While the fisherman

survives to tell of his experience, the philosopher penetrates the mystery of concentric--yet cyclical--destruction.

Through his intimate associations with his boats (they bring him disaster or deliverance), Pym is placed in a position similar to that of the narrator in "MS."

To begin then, the Ariel possesses the jaunty air of youth and hope that sail-boats appear to have. Like the boys, the Ariel too seems eager for the adventure with the sea. As a piece of incidental information, Ariel was the symbolic name for Jerusalem, city of hope. The biblical passage also shows an identification, a parallel existence with Ariel.

> Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices.
>
> Yet I will distress Ariel, and there shall be heaviness and sorrow: and it shall be unto me as Ariel.
>
> (Isa. 29:1-2)

The hope usually associated with the holy city here becomes a promise of tribulation, which is also the function of the Ariel in Pym.

In one sense, The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym traces the initiation of the protagonist to the sea.[21]

[21] Sydney P. Moss sees the initiation as being into evil: "Arthur Gordon Pym or the Fallacy of Thematic Interpretation," The University Review v.33, 1966-67, p. 299, col. 1.

The Ariel is the first test of the novice,[22] a preliminary baptism into Poe's cycle. Pym remains a novice (one preparing to take religious vows) until he boards the Grampus. Although Pym owns the Ariel, he knows nothing of the sea, nor of the boat. He is thus unfamiliar with his environment and situation. "I knew that I was altogether incapable of managing the boat . . . ." (Pym, p.752)

The Penguin rescues the boys from certain death by drowning in the storm in much the same way that nature saves the fetus from suffocation by forcing it through the danger and agony of birth. Being a bird, the Penguin "hatches" Pym and Augustus by cracking the Ariel: "'. . . it was no business of his [the captain's] to be eternally watching for egg-shells . . . .'" (Pym, p.754) As a fore-warning of that descent to the south, she accepts the conversion of Pym who then becomes a proselyte of the rigours of the sea. "It might be supposed that a catastrophe such as I have just narrated would have effectually cooled my incipient passion for the sea. On the contrary, I never experienced a more ardent longing for the wild adventures incident to the life of a navigator than within a week after our miraculous deliverance." (Pym, p.757)

[22] These religious terms are used for purposes of illustration only. It is unlikely that this is a deliberate structure in the narrative.

The Grampus, a whaling vessel like the Penguin, named also for a creature of the south, provides the next link in Pym's fate. Like Pym himself, she "was scarcely sea-worthy" and in contrast to the boys, she was an "old hulk". (Pym, p.757) Pym, still ignorant, does not even attend to the details of his participation, but leaves the entire arrangement for Augustus to plan.

All the unusual features of the Grampus are worthy of note. Pym sees the vessel as "fitted up in the most comfortable style"; ". . . everything appeared of a more roomy and agreeable nature than I had anticipated." (Pym, p.759) Augustus also takes care to show Pym the refrigerator stocked with ". . . a host of delicacies". (Pym, p.760) In ironic contrast to this order and comfort is the confusion and cramping of the hold and the various stages of starvation. It would seem that the worldly pleasures displayed before disembarking are illusory since Pym never again views them, but experiences only pain and deprivation.

After the mutiny aboard the Grampus, there follows a detailed criticism of the stowage with emphasis on the maintenance of stability. For the concerns of the story, Pym is the real cargo, yet obviously he has not been properly "stowed". He lacks balance--maturity--and tends to vacillate in a crisis. He shifts not only because of improper balance, but

also because he is a particle caught in the ebb and flow of the universe. Like the cotton or grain,[23] Pym expands and contracts during the voyage; he is both emaciated from starvation and bloated like a drowned corpse. Also, he complains more and more about his cramped quarters as the voyage progresses, as if he were outgrowing his container. Pym's somewhat smug observations on the stowage prove to be ironic; Pym cannot be settled in any physical sense as he is aboard ship; nor can he be settled spiritually due to his compulsion to re-enact the cosmic cycle. "Thus the two Principles Proper, Attraction and Repulsion--the Material and the Spiritual--accompany each other, in the strictest fellowship, forever. Thus the Body and The Soul walk hand in hand." (Eureka, p.244)

The Jane Guy functions as a transitional point in several respects. The table below shows the development in the relationship between Pym and his ships.

1. Ariel: Pym owns a vessel but cannot control it.
2. Grampus: Pym has neither vessel nor control.
3. Jane Guy: Pym does not own the ship, though he does direct its course.
4. canoe: Pym confiscates a canoe and he controls it temporarily.

23 See Pym, pp. 785-87.

The Penguin is not mentioned in the above because it connects the Ariel and the Grampus only. The function of the ghost ship will be discussed later as its significance is more specifically imagistic than structural.

As Pym moves to a position of control on the Jane Guy--". . . for in some way, hardly known to myself [Pym] I had acquired much influence over him [Captain Guy] . . . ." (Pym, p.851)--the voyage becomes more fantastic and dream-like; Pym manages the details of the internal and therefore, the external trip. "On board the Jane Guy . . . we began to remember what had happened as a frightful dream from which we had been happily awakened, than as events which had taken place in sober and naked reality." (Pym, p.831) Actually, the privations and terrors that they experienced previously, more closely approximate reality than any subsequent developments. Bezanson sees the Jane Guy episode as ". . . a skillful chapter in which the voyagers slide quietly beyond reality and, at last, into a world where Poe can have his own latitude. The Jane Guy has gone behind the mirror."[24]

This section of the narrative then, collapses the barrier between appearance and reality. It marks the turning towards "depersonalization"[25] and towards

[24] Bezanson, p. 168.

[25] Davidson, p. 176.

private symbology. The name alone, the Jane Guy, cancels the differentiation of male and female principles, a familiar device elsewhere in Poe. Moreover, the brig would seem to court disaster, with her tendency to ship seas: ". . . her draught of water was by far too great for the trade to which she was destined." (Pym, p.830) As unsuitable as Pym, she seems impelled towards destruction. Ultimately however, she is destroyed by fire and gunpowder, the scarcity of the latter having caused so much earlier concern to Pym.

Finally then, one must examine the canoe in which Pym makes his second to last trip. (The last voyage is not described; it is the voyage home.) The canoe with its weary occupants, is "of frail structure", a description often applied to the physical propensities of man. Pym and Peters create a makeshift sort of "security" by patching up the holes "with pieces of woolen jacket" just as man continually attempts to stop up the entrances of chaos with familiar items of comfort. The "superfluous paddles", those irrelevant material possessions one collects in the hope of permanence, are "erected [to form] a kind of framework about the bow, so as to break the force of any seas which might threaten to fill us in that quarter." (Pym, p.879)

The paddles and the framework they serve however, are superfluous. The abyss, an ever-threatening

sea, is ineluctable and eternal, though Pym continues to misunderstand his fate; ". . . in fact, the better he [Pym] is able to control his existence, the less he is inclined to speculate on existence."[26] Indeed Pym not only relinquishes contemplation, he simply is not capable of transcending universal limitation, nor can he comprehend the final revelation. Had he understood his voyage, he would have known that it was impossible to convey the message from the Antarctic seas,[27] impossible to defeat the illusory nature of reality by any narrative. Thus, his last trip home cancels his first expedition since nothing has been learned.

(ii)

The question of motion in the narratives poses a few interesting problems. In "MS." one cannot ignore the imagery of a "watery hell where the air grew stagnant", a nether region of those who move without breath. Before the simoon, "The air became intolerably hot, and was loaded with spiral exhalations similar to those arising from a heated iron." ("MS.", p.119) Moreover, the narrator's premonition is not of disaster, but of evil. Initially the second ship too, seems to be a messenger of Hades: ". . . I

[26] Davidson, p. 173.

[27] See The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, "Introductory Note".

became aware of a dull sullen glare of red light which streamed down the sides of the vast chasm. . . . Casting my eyes upwards, I beheld a spectacle which froze the current of my blood." ("MS.", p.121) Even the appearance of the ship is hellish, an unrelieved "deep, dingy black", with "the fires of innumerable battle-lanterns which swung to and fro about her rigging."

Both south and west are images of death: south in Poe because it means descent, west for the setting sun. In "MS.", the first storm comes from the north-west, blowing them "S.E. and by S." ("MS.", pp.119-20) The narrator notes that, "We were well aware, however, of having made farther to the southward than any previous navigators . . . . ." ("MS.", p.121) Again, ". . . the ship proves to be in a current . . . a tide . . . which . . . thunders on to the southward with a velocity like the headlong dashing of a cataract." ("MS.", p.125)

Until the moment of revelation, Pym's route does not vary from the south-west. It would seem that even the wind is an agent of the southwest since a blow from that direction first entices Pym. On heading out on the Ariel, he reiterates for the reader, "The wind, as I before said, blew freshly from the southwest." (Pym, p.751) Both the Penguin and the Grampus are named for creatures of southern waters. Despite the mutiny, the Grampus maintains

direction; the ship, wrecked and rudderless still heads southwest: "On the day we were picked up the schooner was off Cape St. Roque, in longitude thirty-one degrees west; so that, when found, we had drifted probably, from north to south, not less than five and twenty degrees." (Pym, p.831) Again, on the Jane Guy, they "made sail to the southward and westward." (Pym, p.838) The final choice of course that Pym makes in the canoe is also southward.

As before mentioned, to go south is to descend. Quinn notes that, "It is significant especially that when Poe sought to define his notion of perverseness he once more resorted to the image of the fall, the descent into the abyss."[28] The narrators feel and are pulled downwards again and again; they are continually threatened with burial or drowning. Nor can they resist the urge to drop into annihilation, into chaos: ". . . I [Pym] threw my vision far down into the abyss . . . my whole soul was prevaded [sic] with a longing to fall; a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable." (Pym, p.875) In "Maelström" the fisherman recalls that he "became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself. I

[28] Patrick F. Quinn, The French Face of Edgar Poe (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1957), p. 166.

positively felt a wish to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make . . . ." ("Maelstrom", p.135)

In "MS." the narrator would seem to grow restless in his survival; "We are surely doomed to hover continually upon the brink of eternity, without taking a final plunge into the abyss." ("MS.", p.124) Moreover, he too expresses a fascination in the manner of his death. ". . . 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." ("MS.", p.125)

Death then is a compulsion in the narrative--only the fisherman shakes himself free of his fascination; both the winds and the currents of the oceans irrestibly carry their selected victims to destruction.

Circular motion also is significant in these tales. In "Maelstrom", Poe explicitly ties together the two movements--the whirl and the descent: "Here the vast bed of the waters, seamed and scarred into a thousand conflicting channels, burst suddenly into phrensied convulsion--heaving, boiling, hissing--gyrating in gigantic and innumerable vortices, and all whirling and plunging on to the eastward with a rapidity which water never elsewhere assumes, except in precipitous descents." (p.129)

However, it is not only the water which is divided and united; all particles that come within its influence are thereby entrapped in circularity and become part of the cycle of destruction: ". . . if a ship come within its attraction, it is inevitably absorbed and carried down to the bottom, and there beat to pieces against the rocks; and when the water relaxes, the fragments thereof are thrown up again." ("Maelstrom", p.130)

Commenting on the combination of spiral and descent in Poe's sea tales, David Halliburton sees perversity as an integral element in even the destructive face of Nature: ". . . the vortex--the pure spiral movement--is the most equivocal of motions. It is a descent that resists descent, a movement that twists away from itself only to be twisted back to itself by itself. It is as near to non-movement as any movement can be. At the same time it combines two other kinetic 'figures', the circle, traditionally symbolic of harmony and perfection, and the pure descent, symbolic of annihilation and death."[29]

The fisherman saves himself partly by rejecting round, sphere-like shapes. Initially, he releases his hold on the "ring-bolt" [my italics] and then he observes that ". . . superiority in speed of descent

[29] Halliburton, p. 250.

was with the sphere." However, "a cylinder was absorbed the more slowly." ("Maelstrom", p.138) Accordingly, the fisherman chooses a cylinder in the form of a water-cask as a life-preserver which the Moskoe-strom rejects. However, he is physically, intellectually and socially marked by his experience; he is essentially an alienated "ancient mariner".

From Patrick F. Quinn's article, "Poe's Imaginary Voyage", this remark seems more relevant to "Maelstrom" than to Pym: ". . . Bachelard remarks; 'it seems that in the vision of Poe social man is less complex than man-in-nature. Profundity is a function of solitude; our being is deepened in proportion to a more and more profound communion with nature.'"[30]

The narrator of "MS." returns from his point of crisis only in terms of his journal. His physical existence is totally encompassed within his experience of circularity: "It is long since I first trod the deck of this terrible ship, and the rays of my destiny are, I think, gathering to a focus." ("MS.", p.122) However, Poe has provided the least imagery of circularity in this tale of any. Only at the penultimate moment is it tied to the imagery of descent. ". . . the ice opens suddenly to the right, and to the left, and we are whirling dizzily, in immense concentric

30 Hudson Review, 4 (Winter, 1967), 574.

circles, round and round the borders of a gigantic amphitheatre, the summit of whose walls is lost in the darkness and the distance. . . . The circles rapidly grow small--we are plunging madly within the grasp of the whirlpool . . . the ship is quivering--oh God! and--going down!"(pp.125-26)

Halliburton notes another aspect of motion in this tale though: "A second distinguishing characteristic is the peculiar, to-and-fro quality, as of a pendulum swinging, that permeates the description. For the general progress of the ship is not, as one might have thought downward; it is both downward and upward . . . . . 'She paused as if in contemplation': these few words suggest the elusive oxymoronic motion--of motion shot through with stasis--which pervades the narrative."[31]

Pym, too, is entrapped in Poe's concentric mazes. "The phenomena of this water formed the first definite link in that vast chain of apparent miracles with which I was destined to be at length encircled." (Pym, p.852) For Pym to be encircled implies that he forms the centre, which is immobile with reference to its circumference. To explain further, Pym is the pivot of the action in the narrative; everything happens in relation to him. Moreover, though the

[31] Halliburton, pp. 248-49.

locus of the action shifts, the process basically is the same. In other words, even if one changes the color of the circumference, one cannot change its shape or nature. Pym's [mis] adventures rotate about him in repetitive cycles of birth and death, with those two being merely aspects of the same process, beginning and end mutually implicit.

There is another circular movement in the fact of the voyage. Sailing from the United States with a vision of gloomy excitement, Pym tours one side of the globe only to return home no richer, no wiser. One must wonder if Pym is not in stasis, physically mobile and spiritually developing in no direction whatsoever. There is considerable imagery which shows Pym trapped and pinned. In the wreck of the Ariel, Pym is "affixed in the most singular manner to the . . . bottom of the Penguin. . . ." (Pym, p.754); "The head of the bolt had made its way through the collar of the green baize jacket I had on, and through the back part of my neck, forcing itself out between two sinews and just below the right ear." (Pym, p.755) On the deck of the Grampus, Pym ". . . made use of every opportunity to strengthen the lashings which held me to the remains of the windlass. . . ." (Pym, p.802)

The dream-like structure offers the possibility that the entire action takes place as a fantasy of

Pym's, a dream-within-the-dream form. All of Pym's nightmares imply this to some extent, but one in particular is explicit about his obsession. Here the horror lies in the mindless, involuntary uniformity of collective motion; briefly, in futility.

> Shortly after this period I fell into a state of partial insensibility, during which the most pleasing images floated in my imagination; such as green trees, waving meadows of ripe grain, processions of dancing girls, troops of cavalry, and other phantasies. I now remembered that, in all which passed before my mind's eye, motion was a predominant idea. Thus, I never fancied any stationary object, such a house, a mountain, or any thing of that kind; but windmills, ships, large birds, balloons, people on horseback, carriages driving furiously, and similar moving objects, presented themselves in endless succession.
>
> (Pym, p.804)

The feverish dream images are present to a certain extent in the two shorter sea-tales as well. The entire experience of Maelström has a frenzied nightmare quality. In the actual whirl, the fisherman indulges in what should probably be recognized as a vision of arabesque reality. "'Looking about me upon the wide waste of liquid ebony on which we were thus borne, I perceived that our boat was not the only object in the embrace of the whirl. Both above and below us were visible fragments of vessels, large masses of building-timber and trunks of trees, with many smaller articles, such as pieces of house furniture, broken boxes, barrels and staves. . . . I must

have been delirious, for I even sought amusement in speculating upon the relative velocities of their several descents. . . .'" ("Maelström", p.137)

One might here refer to Daniel Hoffman's definitions of arabesque. ". . . arabesque refers to an intricate pattern, geometric in design, which does not reproduce the human form . . . . . What characterizes the Arabesques is their exploration of extreme psychological states . . . ."[32] For the narrator of "MS.", the ancient sailors' mesmerized activities provide this dimension of reality, though the most overt experience is the sighting of the second ship. "I became aware of a dull sullen glare of red light which streamed down the sides of the vast chasm where we lay, and threw a fitful brilliancy upon our deck. . . . Her [the ship's] huge hull was of a deep dingy black, unrelieved by any of the customary carvings of a ship. A single row of brass cannon protruded from her open ports, and dashed from the polished surfaces the fires of innumerable battle lanterns which swung to and fro about her rigging." ("MS.", p.121) The significance of these passages of "arabesque" lies in what they say about the nature of motion--and therefore, reality--in the tales. It is through hallucinatory, or delirious, visions that all

32 Hoffman, pp. 207 and 210.

Poe's protagonists come to their glimpses of "supernal" reality or Beauty, and thereby deliver this message to the reader.

Motion then is not only a means of moving through physical space; it provides passage through the dimensions of the psyche as well. All three narrators' adventures are of the spirit, their physical situations providing only the stimulation. The principle is that of intense meditation--physical deprivation as a means to spiritual revelation.

(iii)

This cyclical structure naturally affects Poe's use of birth and death imagery. Just as each of Pym's voyages parallel previous expeditions in their disasters, so too does Pym seem to re-enact birth and death scenes. With a reference to Eureka, one cannot help but wonder if Pym does imitate the cosmic process. Hoffman links this imagery with the voyage and the ships:

> . . . the voyage . . . is the journey of the 'soul' remembering back, back, back, to its very beginnings. Back through the vortex of birth. The ship, 'her' bulk swelling like a living body in whose hold he secretes himself--what is 'she' but an image of the mother's womb. . . . For indeed the womb is the well-fount of our unconsciousness before we emerge into the pains of consciousness, and in the womb we are imbued with that instinctual knowledge of our own past, our own beginnings, the state of unity toward which we ever

> after yearn. But to attain that state after being banished from it by our birth--this is to court, to seek, to embrace destruction.[33]

O'Donnell remarks that ". . . Pym's ambivalent feeling toward life and death . . ." is comparable with the ". . . repulsion/attraction idea."[34]

Not only are Pym's feelings noteworthy, the actual instances of birth and resurrection take place on the ground of death. In another of Pym's dreams, this time in the hold of the Grampus, serpents "held me in their embrace, and looked earnestly in my face with their fearfully shining eyes." (Pym, p.763) Aside from the profferment of self-knowledge, the image of the serpents also recall the ourobouros (∞) that symbol of infinity--it could also be described as a circle (O). One must always begin and end at the identical point.

The description of the Ariel as an egg-shell has been discussed earlier, but it must be recalled in the destruction of the Grampus, in which the ocean which threatens death by drowning brings deliverance; in this, the waters are those of birth. Again in the fiery destruction of the Jane Guy, one may be permitted to correlate the explosive shattering of the shell, to allow the new life to grow.

[33] Hoffman, p. 148.

[34] Charles O'Donnell, p. 88 (col.2).

All these apocalyptic resurrections, however, also cause either death or injury. The water both restores and removes life. While burial in the oceans is Augustus' end, immersion in salt water revitalizes Pym's energies. (Pym, p.814)

On board the Grampus, eighteen months after the Ariel incident, Pym is stowed away in the hold of the ship. This voluntary confinement (using the latter word with both its connotations) is an experience of confusion and disorder. "The taper gave out so feeble a ray that it was with the greatest difficulty I could grope my way through the confused mass of lumber among which I now found myself." (Pym, p. 760) Pym is always groping to find his way. (Pym, p.762) In the hold, all normal referent points of time and space have been removed. Moreover, the box which is Pym's home seems coffin-like, (Pym, p. 760) yet it is his protection from the mutineers.

Because of the complications on deck, Augustus is not able to deliver Pym from the hold; as a consequence, Pym nearly suffocates. The close air calls to mind Poe's live interments elsewhere. Suffocation, insufficient air can mean either the death or birth struggle, both prospects terrifying Pym even in dream: "Among other miseries I was smothered to death between huge pillows, by demons of the most ferocious and ghastly aspect." (Pym, p.763) One notes the

implications of the pillows and the word, "(s)mothered". Also, the whip-cord and chain cable which guide him to the trap, may be seen as versions of the umbilical cord. Hunger and thirst, along with a lack of fresh air contribute to Pym's delirium, a condition purportedly experienced by the newly-dead and probably by the new-born as well.[35]

One other aspect of this passage ought to be mentioned here. Pym's fear of sleep and dreams greatly resembles a fear of death. "I was overpowered, too, with a desire to sleep, yet trembled at the thought of indulging it, lest there might exist some pernicious influence . . . in the confined air of the hold." (Pym, p.762) Poe compares sleep and death in Marginalia:

> We might contrive a very poetical and very suggestive, although, perhaps, no very tenable philosophy, by supposing that the virtuous live while the wicked suffer annihilation, hereafter; and that the danger of the annihilation (which would be in the ratio of the sin) might be indicated nightly by slumber, and occasionally, with more distinctness, by a swoon. In proportion to the dreamlessness of the sleep, for example, would be the degree of the soul's liability to annihilation. In the same way, to swoon and awake in utter unconsciousness of any lapse of time during the syncope, would demonstrate the soul to be then in such condition that, had death occurred, annihilation would have followed. On the other

[35] See Marie Bonaparte's discussion of birth imagery in Pym, The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation (London: Imago Publishing Co. Ltd., 1949), pp. 290-352.

> hand, when the revival is attended with remembrance of visions, (as is now and then the case, in fact,) then the soul to be considered in such condition as would insure its existence after the bodily death--the bliss or wretchedness of the existence to be indicated by the character of the vision.
>
> (Marginalia, pp.70-71)

It also recalls Pym's complex drives toward and away from descent (into the grave) and therefore to the south. Just as Pym is compelled to sleep by the toxic fumes, so is he lured to the south, willed to fall into Peters' arms and to re-enact the circle of birth and death. His natural urge to preserve his identity conflicts with his drive to find the One, the Ultimate Self. Dressing up as the corpse of Hartman Rogers, Pym aids in overcoming the mutineers, yet he also intuitively understands the significance of his action. ". . . by the dim light of a kind of battle lantern, I was so impressed with a sense of vague awe at my appearance, and at the recollection of the terrific reality which I was thus representing, that I was seized with a violent tremor. . . ." (Pym, p.796)

In Tsalal, Pym endures another burial. The ambush is the overt technical device, but really the process begins as he encounters the black natives. Their blackness symbolizes the holds of all ships, all traps, all wombs and all tombs. After the ambush,

Pym is literally buried. "I firmly believed that no incident ever occurring in the course of human events is more adapted to inspire the supremeness of mental and bodily distress than a case like our own, of living inhumation. The blackness of darkness which envelops the victim, the terrific oppression of lungs, the stifling fumes from the damper, unite with the ghastly considerations that we are beyond the remotest confines of hope. . . ." (Pym, p.861)

However, Pym has been conceived and finds a path:"The breadth of the seam was barely sufficient to admit us. . . ." (Pym, p.862)--through which he tunnels to find life, the symbols of seams and ravines being obvious. Marie Bonaparte analyzes the labyrinth of the chasm as symbolic of the bowels of the mother.[36] Also, to lose one's way in a maze is to suffer death by starvation.

The final scene of revelation would seem to be the most affirmative of life. On this last voyage, Pym remains calm, suffering no discomfort or serious deprivation. Indeed the water is warm and of a "milky consistency and hue". From a limited analysis, this is the real birth scene, the others being merely movements in the womb. Daylight has of course been continual for a long time. Without volition, in the grip of "a powerful current" Pym is drawn southward

[36] Bonaparte, pp. 341-42.

(that is down). He is surrounded by warmth and moistness (the vapours). Moreover, he sees the whiteness of the summit, a fairly obvious anatomical reference, and the flitting images, for this purpose, a child's myopic first look at the world.[37]

Obviously, the birth and death imagery of the other sea-tales follows a much simpler structure than in Pym. If Pym voyages toward a new vision of life, then the narrator of "MS." travels only to a vision of destruction. From "a more entire calm it is impossible to [conceive]", of warmth and moistness, he is thrown into "a wilderness of foam" and a tremendous rocking motion. Again, "Stunned by the shock of the water, I found myself, upon recovery, jammed in between the stern-post and rudder", ("MS.", p.119) could be explicitly read as an intermediate stage in labour. From the fifth day on however, an absolute blackness sets in, in which the narrator's near-drownings offer no hope of birth, but seem only to immerse him deeper in the black seas and death.

Like Pym, he "gasped for breath" and on the second ship, he hides in ". . . a convenient retreat between the timbers of the ship." ("MS.", p.122)

But the imagery here is more coffin- than womb-like. Unlike the Grampus, this ship is so-

[37] It should also be noted that these images could equally be seen as Platonic "ideal" forms, glimpsed but not clearly seen by Pym.

forsaken, that there is not sufficient life aboard to challenge or even acknowledge the narrator. Halliburton too notes this situation: "The crew's reaction to the narrator in 'MS. Found in a Bottle' underlines the close relation between language and being: their failure to perceive the word he paints is the corollary of their failure to perceive the fact that he exists."[38]

If the narrator's mind is filled with a dusty accumulation of uncreative knowledge, then indeed the ship in which he hides himself is of his own workings. Nor does he have sufficient imagination to throw himself rather than his manuscript into the sea; instead, his "self-possession" imprisons him on ships of futility. Only at the conclusion of the tale is there any relief--if the "final plunge into the abyss"--is relief. Considering the opening ice and the "gigantic amphitheatre" as images of deliverance, the spiritual birth of this narrator impresses one by its negativity, much as do Pym's preliminary "deaths". Only in Pym, does Poe seem to achieve any peace in his scenario of creation within destruction.

In "Maelström", Poe seems to have handled the problem somewhat differently. The horror and futility of "MS." becomes intellectual frustration in "Maelström". The introductory quote from Glanville

[38] Halliburton, p. 253.

is a key to the story. Democritus believed that the whirl of atoms caused the heavier atoms to sink and form the earth and the lighter atoms to rise and form the heavens. Also, the only means to true understanding lay in pure thought--Dupin's ratiocination--rather than in the evidence of the senses. Yet this method, while allowing clarity of perception, also implies intellectual separation from the mystery of universal motion.

The fisherman's near-contact with death is insufficient to contain "the vastness, profundity, and unsearchableness" of the whirlpool. The six days of the narrator of "MS." are collapsed into "six hours of deadly terror . . ." which fundamentally alter the fisherman, "body and soul". Though he assumes the positions of birth, ". . . I threw myself flat on deck, with my feet against the narrow gunwhale of the bow, and with my hands grasping a ring-bolt near the foot of the mast" ("Maelström", p.133) and is immersed in the waters, his sacrifice of sensual perception, ". . . the confusion of mind occasioned by the wind and spray together. They blind, deafen, and strangle you, and take away all power of action or reflection" ("Maelström", p.136) and even of his identity, "Those who drew me on board were my old mates and daily companions--but they knew me no more than they would have known a traveller from the

spirit-land" ("Maelström", p.139) only serves to introduce, not immerse, him to the mysteries of the whirlpool.

There is no evidence that the fisherman's ordeal has affected a spiritual change comparable to the physical alteration. Even the ability to recognize arabesque reality is withdrawn when the fisherman is delivered from the whirlpool. He remembers how ". . . I could make out nothing distinctly on account of a thick mist in which every thing was enveloped, and over which there hung a magnificient rainbow, like that narrow and tottering bridge which Musselmen say is the only pathway between Time and Eternity." ("Maelström", p.137) Yet ". . . the froth and the rainbow . . ." ("Maelström", p.139) disappear when he is out of danger. In fact, he doesn't cross the bridge; he returns to the realm of time--as perhaps indeed he must. Poe's Nirvana is one of the most ineluctable and frustrating ever to torture human aspiration and none of Poe's protagonists completely escape the dominion of whirling concentric circles.

(iv)

The auditory imagery, which is contextually related to that of birth and death, has apocalyptic connotations. As the Ariel is crushed, Pym hears, "a loud and long scream or yell, as if from the

throats of a thousand demons. . . ." (Pym, p.753) The lion of Pym's dream in the hold "roars like the thunder of the firmament. . . ." (Pym, p.763) The gales Pym hears are described as ". . . a dull humming sound . . ." and ". . . the horrible shrieking din . . . ." (Pym, pp. 762, 802) From the ghost ship, comes "the scream of a human voice", an echo of Pym's internal terror; it is also the sound Parker does not make when stabbed by Peters. The natives of Tsalal who rush out in overwhelming numbers, create a ". . . din . . . so excessive as to be absolutely deafening." (Pym, p.849)

Noise contributes largely to the terror of the fisherman and the philosopher of "MS." In "MS.", the first aural warning the narrator receives of the simoon is "a loud, humming noise, like that occasioned by the rapid revolution of a mill-wheel . . ." ("MS.", p.119), symbol of the concentric circles in which he will ultimately be caught. The next sound he hears is "the voice of an old Swede" who also draws his attention to the second ship: ". . . a quick scream from my companion broke fearfully upon the night 'See! see!' cried he, shrieking in my ears, 'Almighty God! see! see!' as he spoke I became aware. . . ." ("MS.", p.121) Like Pym, the philosopher externalizes his own screams of terror; one is also reminded of the scream Pym hears from the ghost ship.

In "Maelström" it is the fisherman's brother who screams the horrible information: ". . . he put his mouth close to my ear, and screamed the 'Moskoe-ström!'" ("Maelström", p.133) And, "Presently he shook his head, looking as pale as death, and held up one of his fingers as if to say 'listen'" ("Maelström", p.134) There is also a "shrieking din" in "Maelström": "At the same moment the roaring noise of the water was completely drowned in a kind of shrill shriek--such a sound as you might imagine given out by the water-pipes of many thousand steam-vessels letting off their steam altogether." (p.135)

The other incident going on "at the same moment" is the shift of the boat, placing it between "the world of ocean" and the whirlpool. The shriek then is one of both defiance and terror, yet one must wonder if the sound is not an aural hallucination since the origin of the sound is never pinpointed; moreover, "the roar of its [the water's] impetuous ebb to the sea is scarce equalled by the loudest and most dreadful cataracts; the noise being heard several leagues off . . . ." ("Maelstrom", p.130) It would seem highly improbable that any other external noise could predominate.

From shrieking, Pym experiences the "silent" noise of the sonic boom. First, there is the "concussion" of the ambush and then there is the shattering

explosion of the Jane Guy: ". . . and, lastly, came the concussion in its fullest fury, which hurled us impetuously from our feet, while the hills echoed and re-echoed the tumult. . . ." (Pym, p.868) Peters embraces Pym with his voice when he calls the warning in the ravine. The ultimate sound is of course that of the cataract, "rolling silently" and the rushing and mighty, but soundless winds. . . ." (Pym, p.882) Pym has passed not only through and beyond fragmentation of light (colour), but also beyond the diffusion of silence (sound) and into totality--or at least so it appears.

In contrast to the tranquility of Pym's revelation scene is the philosopher's descent into the whirlpool: ". . . amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and tempest, the ship is . . . going down!" ("MS.", p.126) and the fisherman's immersion in "the howling Phlegethon" ("Maelström", p.130), the fiery river of Hades. It would seem that the philosopher becomes too involved in the elements of destruction and is destroyed before he experiences silence. The fisherman on the other hand, by his intellectual activity, separates himself from the experience, thus surviving but denying himself the next stage. Only after subjecting Pym to several cycles, does Poe feel justified in presenting another dimension of revelation. Halliburton notes that

Poe arrives at all conclusions by "gradations or shades of development".[39]

(v)

Since others have devoted much effort to the colour imagery of Pym, only a brief mention of certain details will be made here. O'Donnell's general observations on this are probably the most accurate and interesting. On blackness, he says: "Black . . . is the absence of all color . . . nor can it be broken up into separate parts. Black can only struggle to stay the same . . . therefore associated with . . . the life wish."[40] One might remark however, that the blackness of the womb is also the darkness of the grave. Moreover, the savagery of blackness, the fierce instinct for self-preservation it connotes in the primitive natives, imitates the cycle of whiteness--even while it fears it.

Certainly the blackness, the "eternal night", experienced in "MS." tends more to that of the grave. The textural quality of this has been commented on earlier. The gigantic ship, like the absolute black of the environment, makes no compromise with the cycle of whiteness either: "Her hull was of a deep dingy black, unrelieved by any of the customary carvings of a ship." ("MS.", p.121)

39 Halliburton, p. 249.

40 O'Donnell, p. 87 (col. 2).

The ancient crew in their greyness however, may be seen either as mediators between the absolute colours and relative time zones or as in incomplete stages of blackness: "His [the captain's] gray hair hairs are records of the past, and his grayer eyes are sybils of the future." ("MS.", p.124) Rather than encountering a barrier in whiteness, it would seem that the imagery of blackness (the ship and the night) passes through the white ice without any contact being made at all.

The interaction between black and white in "Maelström" is evidenced primarily in the appearance of the old fisherman: "It took less than a single day to change these hairs from a jetty black to white . . ." ("Maelström, p.127) The water of "Maelstrom" is the primary imagery of blackness. "I . . . beheld a wide expanse of ocean, whose waters were so inky a hue as to bring at once to my mind the Nubian geographer's account of the Mare Tenebrarum." ("Maelström, p.128); and the whirlpool, . . . whose interior . . . was a smooth, shining, and jet-black wall of water. . . ." ("Maelström", p.129) Only the curiously bright moonlight and the white foam at the edge of the whirl provide any relief from the ebony of the rocks and water. The conflict is centred between the immobility of the rocks and the constant motion of the waters, an internal war of blackness

Through his participation, the fisherman is marked by his white hair. Whiteness here must be seen not even as an independent force but as a result of the raging blackness.

Pym is afraid to sleep in the hold of the Grampus because of the effects of fumes like those of "fiery charcoal". Onto the black charcoal, Pym projects his ambivalent attitude towards cannibalism, a symbol of the intermingling of all elements.

Intermingling is perhaps the most terrifying aspect of whiteness because it necessitates an infinite labyrinth, an unending trap. The waters of Tsalal, while they are individual, flow together in the same stream, only temporarily differentiated one from the other.

One might note here O'Donnell's analysis of whiteness in Pym: "The separate colors, the disparate elements, struggle to achieve the perfect condition of white, to blend into unity. Whiteness or light is therefore associated in the novel with death, with the giving up of the struggle, with submitting to the metamorphosis, the terrifying change to a bodiless condition of unity with the larger design."[41] There would seem to be a close relationship between the Auroras, islands for which Pym searches, the Aurora Borealis, the comparable description of the waters

[41] O'Donnell, p. 87 (col. 2).

of Tsalal ("like the hues of a changeable silk") and whiteness, according to O'Donnell's analysis. Ignoring for the moment the geographical difficulties, the Aurora Borealis of the north acts very like Pym's cataract and curtains. From a distance, one sees white sheets, but the closer in proximity, the more distinct the colours.

The fear between black and white is bound to be great because their combination would necessitate mutual annihilation. Thus, Pym fears Peters' saving embrace, mainly because it means a capitulation to one of the elemental powers. What Pym does not understand is that blackness exists not equally, but within the circle of whiteness, just as the black natives of Tsalal live in continual daylight due to their proximity to the pole.

If one were to attempt a sociological interpretation, one could also say that Poe is indicating the American South, the danger of abolitionism and miscegnation. Black and white, in symbolic terms, exist only in a hierarchical structure and both subject to cosmic process.

As a final mention of colour, one must acknowledge O'Donnell's insight into the significance of redness in Pym, in his interpretation of the word "blood" in Augustus' message to Pym on the Grampus. He remarks that, as it is dissociated from other words,

it is the "disjointedness" that renders it terrifying. Indeed, this is the nature of fear in the narrative. Things can only be understood in the context of the larger design, a pattern which the characters can never comprehend. The "veins of water" quoted previously are also related since they are named for "blood" vessels. For the purposes of this discussion, each person's blood is his uniquely, yet it is of the same essence, with the same function, flowing in the same patterns in every individual. While individuals are cut off from each other by physical boundaries, each is subject to the same natural laws and there may be a mingling of personalities--as in the case of Augustus and Pym.

The three colours then, seem to interact as aspects of death and terror. Black causes blood-shed (the black cook/executioner of the Grampus; the treachery of the natives of Tsalal) yet it also fears the combination of red and white, blood and bones. The relationship between whiteness and death has already been explored, but white also connotes ferocity (the teeth of Tiger) and especially when combined with red as in the various animals of the south which have "scarlet" claws and teeth. Pym's masquerade as Hartman Rogers' corpse and the "hermaphrodite" brig are combinations of all three colours. The latter is

also a message of death, yet it is a death more akin to that of the Flying Dutchman than a natural expiration.

A brief mention will be made here about metallic colouring which would seem to signify imprisonment. Pym is pinned to the bottom of the Penguin which "was coppered and copper-fastened". (Pym, p.754) In the hold of the Grampus, Pym hides in an "iron-bound box". (Pym, p.760) The "spiral exhalations" in "MS." resemble those "arising from heated iron". ("MS.", p. 119) The first ship in this tale is "copper-fastened" and the second ship has "A single row of brass cannon . . . ." ("MS.", pp.119, 121) And it is a "copper-coloured cloud" that hems in the fisherman of "Maelström". (p.133)

## III

"He who has but a moment to live, has nothing further to hide", is the introductory quote used by Poe in "MS.", with obvious reference to the narrator of the tale, whose greatest worry would seem to be posthumous public opinion. However, he characterizes himself as a socially alienated man, "Ill usage and length of years have driven me from the one [his country] and estranged me from the other [his family]." ("MS.", p.118) And, events serve to wrap him even tighter in the hold of his mind and prejudices.[42]

Between himself and the crew of the first ship, there is the distance of race and station, ". . . the crew, consisting principally of Malays, stretched themselves deliberately upon deck." ("MS.", p.119) The first captain too, disregards him as completely as does the second: "I told the captain of my fears; but he paid no attention to what I said, and left me without deigning to give a reply." ("MS.", p.120) Finally, crew and captain are physically removed as well by the simoon, leaving only the narrator and an old Swede. In the discussion of auditory imagery, it has already been suggested that the old Swede acts as mouthpiece and his function is to externalize the narrator's fears, for the former never actually dies

42 See also Halliburton's reading of this passage, p. 245.

in the narrative; he simply disappears with the change of ships--and crews. Also, the philosopher's need to preserve "the severe precincts of truth" requires another to present all irrational dimensions of the situation, so while his "soul [was] wrapt in silent wonder", "superstitious terror crept by degrees into the spirit of the old Swede." ("MS.", p.121)

On the second ship, the narrator deliberately imprisons himself in the hold of his ship, "An indefinite sense of awe, which at first sight of the navigators of the ship had taken hold of my mind, was perhaps the principle of my concealment." ("MS.", p.122) Until he ascertains the crew's complete disinterest in his very existence, the narrator remains hidden. Swaddling himself in "a pile of ratlin-stuff and old sails, in the bottom of the yawl" ("MS.", p. 123) he unwittingly paints the word "Discovery", an incident both significant and ironic. The geographical "discovery" of Mercator's maps is obsolete; and it is a discovery which can lead only to destruction and never to revelation: "It is evident that we are hurrying onward to some exciting knowledge--some never-to-be-imparted secret, whose attainment is destruction." ("MS.", p.125)

Halliburton draws attention to another ironic dimension of the word. The only new item on the ship is the narrator, and he is never "discovered", so

"He turns therefore to an audience of readers--becomes in effect an author. To write words that others can read is to prove the reality of his experience and of his very being: it is to put one's faith . . . in the guardianship of language."[43]

If on the other hand, the discovery is self-awareness then he is as blind as Pym of his actual condition. "A feeling, for which I have no name, has taken possession of my soul--a sensation which will admit of no analysis, to which the lessons of bygone time are inadequate, and for which I fear futurity itself will offer me no key." ("MS.", p.122) The very structure of the narrator's mind would indicate that he is incapable of self-analysis. Unlike the fisherman of "Maelström" or the detective Dupin, his inability to experience "the reveries of fancy" or "eloquent madness" ("MS.", p.118) would seem to make him an excellent victim for illusions of sensual perception.

The ancient crewmen can be discussed in their relationships both to the narrator and to the second ship. If the ship is the sponge of time, then the crewmen are the custodians of a museum of man; they are also the navigators who bring the ship to destruction that life may begin anew. "The ship and all in it are imbued with the spirit of Eld. The crew

[43] Halliburton, p. 253.

glide to and fro like the ghosts of buried centuries; their eyes have an eager and uneasy meaning. . . ." ("MS.", p.125) And just before the ship goes down, the crew obviously has information not possessed by the narrator, "The crew pace the deck with unquiet and tremulous step; but there is upon their countenance an expression more of the eagerness of hope than of the apathy of despair." ("MS.", p.125)

The narrator cannot make any communication with the crewmen--partly because they look with hope and he with despair; their language is unknown to him and faint: ". . . although the speaker was close at my elbow, his voice seemed to reach my ears from the distance of a mile." ("MS.", p.125) Despite this lack of other than visual contact, the atmosphere of the ship and the crewmen themselves gives the narrator a hint of another dimension of reality: "A new sense--a new entity is added to my soul." ("MS.", p.122)

The fisherman of "Maelström" too, is cut off from human contact in his experience of the whirlpool. He and his two brothers are the only men to even attempt to fish "among the islands beyond Moskoe". They do not allow even their sons to accompany them on these dangerous expeditions.

As the storm sets in, so too does the sense of isolation, ". . . it became suddenly so dark that we could not see each other in the smack." ("Maelström",

p.133) The youngest brother is almost immediately swept away with the main mast. Communication between the other two brothers becomes increasingly difficult, ". . . the din had so increased that I could not make him hear a single word, although I screamed at the top of my voice in his ear." ("Maelström", p.134) As the older brother lapses into hysterics, wrestling the ring-bolt from the fisherman, all communication--even signals--ceases to be effective. "I attracted my brother's attention by signs . . . and did every thing in my power to make him understand what I was about to do . . . . It was impossible to reach him . . . so I resigned him to his fate. . . ." ("Maelstrom", p.139) It must be observed here that "the bitter struggle" with which a brother is abandoned, is as unemotional as Pym's many disastrous partings with his fellows. The surviving fisherman's isolation follows him beyond the whirlpool, however; not only does he become unrecognizable to his "daily companions", but his story is received with skepticism and disbelief. ("Maelström", p.140)

"Maelström" differs from "MS." and Pym in that there is more than one narrator. Because the fisherman is not well-educated--it is from "an old school master" that he learns "the use of the words 'cylinder' and 'sphere'" ("Maelström", p.138)--the first narrator provides the scholarly frame for the story.

He elaborates a structural frame for the narrative through his esoteric allusions while describing his reaction to the Moskoe-strom, his literacy thus augmenting the honesty of the fisherman. The narrator of "MS." presents his intellectual credentials immediately. A similar apology is presented in the "Introductory Note" to Pym. The "you" of the last sentence of "Maelström" probably refers not to the first narrator at all, but to the "public at large", whose opinion is of such concern to the other narrators.

The characterization in Pym requires more detailed analysis. John H. Stroupe remarks on the omnipresence of Pym in the narrative: "Pym is almost always present in the action; and when he is not (as in the case of the mutiny) he interprets the description of the action. In fact, Pym is the only character to emerge in full."[44] It is not so much that Pym is the hero though, so much as that Pym is Ego, is Awareness. All characters act in relationship to his actions and are dispensed with or combine with other characters, at the technical requirements of Pym. Pym alone experiences joy or pain, though the others reflect his states of mind or attitudes. Through the machinations of Edgar A. Poe, Pym is also the narrator, author and editor of The Narrative of A. Gordon

44 John H. Stroupe, "Poe's Imaginary Voyage: Pym as Hero" Studies in Short Fiction, Summer 1967, Newberry College, South Carolina.

Pym; despite the game played in "Introductory Note" and "Note", the various personnel all share Pym's ignorance and limitations. Thus, there is only one consciousness controlling Pym's universe and that is the (C)creator.

The intertwining in the characters of Augustus and Pym is overt in the first chapters. Pym is infected with Augustus' enthusiasm for the sea, that is, for the search for unity, for understanding (an ironic device since unity is a temporary side of being) but he is unequipped for its rigours and he lacks the means. Both of these requirements Augustus fills for him: "It is probable, indeed, that our intimate communion had resulted in a partial interchange of character." (Pym, p.757) Pym manipulates Augustus like a puppet in order to keep him alive since without him, Pym cannot embark on his voyage. Twice he mentions that the only reason for Augustus' continuing to live is that he has tied him into a safe position: "This rope, it will be remembered, I had myself tied round his waist, and made fast to a ring-bolt for the purpose of keeping him in an upright position. . . ." (Pym, p.755) Augustus is saved twice by Pym's agents: one is Peters who saves Augustus from murder in the mutiny; the other is Pym's dog, Tiger, that attacks Jones who is stabbing Augustus.

During the storm on the Grampus, Pym does not help Augustus to lash himself to the deck, but awaits his removal. His final death and watery burial is the fulfillment of his near-drowning on the Ariel. Also, his function is terminated with the close of the Grampus episode.

Peters assumes Augustus' role as assistant and alter-ego to Pym. The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym has been described as a "journey to the end of the page", with the central image being the water of Tsalal. In this, Peters too would figure. His first name--Dirk--calls to mind the knife inserted in the waters. Moreover, he is a combination of white and dark, like the finished page, and his occupation is that of "line manager".

Another somewhat improbable but interesting connection is revealed in Pym's and Peter's names. Dirk Peters suggests a knife--or sword--in a rock. Arthur could refer to King Arthur and his sword, Excalibur; Gordon for Gordian knot which was cut by Alexander the Great with his sword. 'To cut the Gordian knot' means to execute a bold solution, the irony being that the knot Pym hacks at continuously is unravelled for the reader only. Also, Pym's actions would be more accurately described as foolhardy, than bold.

In his more obvious relationship to Pym, Peters tempers the latter's drives to the south, to death, though he himself is an emissary from the "fastness of the Black Hills".(Pym, p.776) While never denying or refusing Pym, he checks his headlong rush to death. On the Grampus, he protects Pym and Augustus from the mutineers, though he allows Pym to masquerade as a corpse. When all four are near death by starvation, it is Peters in his role as the "knife", the man from the Black Hills, who kills Parker for food. Parker is the lamb who is sacrificed to propitiate the gods. Pym describes him as suffering "with great patience, making no complaint, and endeavoring to inspire us with hope in every manner he could devise." (Pym, p. 814)

Temporarily on the Jane Guy, Peters is displaced by Captain Guy, who in his "timidity", acts for the uncertain, the cowardly Pym, and complements the obsessive-compulsive Pym. It is only later in the face of immediate danger that Peters is released: ". . . when I fell directly over the head and shoulders of my companion, who, I soon discovered, was buried in a loose mass of earth as far as his middle, and struggling desperately to free himself from the pressure." (Pym, p.861)

Pym and Peters, having traversed the chasm, finally find a cliff to descend by means of knotted

handkerchiefs and knives. [my italics] At this point, Pym loses his nerve; with an almost sexual anticipation, he tries to fulfill his death wish, only to be "suspended" (Pym, p.875) by Peters. Peters, who has previously beaten three natives to death, ascends from the abyss to save Pym. In other words, while Peters performs bloody deeds for Pym, he also anticipates any danger to the Pym-identity. Like Augustus, he is a tool, the means of achieving Pym/Poe's goal. At the conclusion Pym and Peters become "we", though all exchange between them ceases.

Another "character" who greatly disturbs readers is Pym's dog, Tiger, who mysteriously appears and disappears. Tiger conveniently operates as part of Pym's hallucinations in the hold. He also provides communication between Pym and Augustus during the mutiny. After the storm on the wreckage of the Grampus, Pym awakens to the delusion that Parker is his dog, Tiger. (Pym, p.804) The fierce relationship Pym and Tiger maintain in the hold becomes particularly noteworthy when the four starving men cast lots. Pym then feels ". . . all the fierceness of the tiger . . . [in his] bosom" (Pym, p.819) towards Parker, who may deprive him of life. Thus, Tiger becomes a temporary element of Pym's character.

To summarize, it would seem that the tales within the narrative, and the characters within the

tales are the creation of one personality. One might note how often Pym describes his circumstances as "unique" or "singular", meaning unusual and one-of-a-kind.[45] Pym creates the adventures in which he participates and his process of discovery moves inward to the essentials.

Characters only slightly related to Pym seem to recur as different individuals with the same name in the narrative. The Grampus is prepared by the firm of Lloyd and Vredenburgh. Later, on the Jane Guy, an American named Peter Vredenburgh falls overboard. One of the mutineers on the Grampus is named William Allen. Ambushed with Pym and Peters on Tsalal is a man named Wilson Allen. The combination of names results in William Wilson (Allen), a name used by Poe in one of his most explicit tales of the "double" or alter-ego.

[45] See also Pym, p. 813.

## IV

One of the most persistent themes in Poe's works involves destiny. The three narrators of the sea tales are compelled either through the necessities of their characters or through circumstance, but only the fisherman makes a relatively free decision. Pym's adventure on the Ariel shows the normal process of common sense upset by a feeling of compulsion, "I can hardly tell what possessed me . . . ." (Pym, p.751) Before Pym embarks on the Grampus, his "prophetic glimpses of a destiny" do not in any way deter him; rather, they encourage him. The wreckage of the Ariel is a forewarning and a prophecy which Pym cannot recognize; to know one's fate is to allow for the possibility of denial.

Similarly, the philosopher of "MS." is driven from his homeland to the seas and later indulges in fatalistic acceptance, "My companion spoke of the lightness of our cargo and the excellent qualities of our ship; but I could not help feeling the hopelessness of hope itself. . . ." ("MS.", p.121) It is in the nature of man to retain hope of survival even against overwhelming odds, yet Poe's narrators seem to almost eagerly relinquish themselves to external forces, ". . . [I] prepared myself gloomily for that death which I thought nothing could defer beyond an hour . . . ." ("MS.", p.121)

Unlike Pym, however, neither the narrator of "MS.", nor the fisherman receive any "prophetic glimpses": "We set out . . . never dreaming of danger, for indeed we saw not the slightest reason to apprehend it." ("Maelström, p.133) The fisherman's developing uneasiness results from meteorological, rather than intuitive warnings.[46] However, the fisherman resembles the others in the way in which he abandons panic: "It may appear strange, but now, when we were in the very jaws of the gulf, I felt more composed than when we were only approaching it. Having made up my mind to hope no more . . . ." ("Maelström," p.135)

All the winds, currents and ocean storms conspire to manoeuvre the protagonists to their fates. In "MS.", the oak ship seems "to be within the influence of some strong current, or impetuous undertow." ("MS.", p.124) Again, ". . . the ship proves to be in a . . . tide which . . . thunders on to the southward with a velocity like the headlong dashing of a cataract." ("MS.", p.125) Moreover, the narrator recognizes the linking of his fate and the ship's: "It is long since I first trod the deck of this terrible ship, and the rays of my destiny are, I think, gathering to a focus." ("MS.", p.122)

[46] Cf. "MS.", p. 119 and "Maelström", p. 133.

In the final canoe scene in Pym, Pym and Peters totally submit to the pull from the south--to resist is to suffer Nu-Nu's death. Two of the ocean vessels on which Pym sails are obviously messengers from and to the south. The analogy between Pym and his ships made earlier, is recalled here in view of their dependence on weather, "The brig was a mere log, rolling about at the mercy of every wave. . . ." (Pym, p.803) Pym is a prisoner of the ships, which in turn are subject to the will of the seas.

The disquieting sign which first alerts the fisherman is an unusual "breeze from over Helseggen". ("Maelström", p.134) It is the wind which decides their fate: "With the wind that now drove us on, we were bound for the whirl of the Strom, and nothing could save us!" ("Maelström", p.135) Not only the wind, however, but the "amazing velocity" of the whirl rushes the little smack to the abyss. The escape of the fisherman is due solely to his abandoning the ship for the water-cask, which is not so violently influenced by the winds and currents.

Whether survival or destruction results, the narrators are imprisoned and literally bound to their destinies. The narrator of "MS." is either "jammed between stern-post and rudder" or else tied "to the stump of the mizen-mast" ("MS.", p.121) or hidden

away in the hold of the second ship until he realizes that his fate is intertwined with that ship's in any case: "Concealment is utter folly on my part . . . ." ("MS.", p.123)

The imagery of entrapment also leads one to see Pym as a prisoner rather than as a creator of his destiny. He is bound in his womb/tombs, thus allowing him no choice. In the hold of the Grampus, he attempts escape but finds the trap-door immovable. After the ambush on Tsalal, he exhumes himself only to find that he must further abandon personal plans in the canoe.

The rookery of the albatross and the penguin suggest a natural law of order, and the image created in the mind's eye is that of a cast fish-net: "The next process is to partition out the whole area into small squares exactly equal in size. This is done by forming narrow paths, very smooth, and crossing each other at right angles throughout the entire extent of the rookery. At each intersection of these paths the nest of an albatross is constructed, and a penguin's nest in the centre of each square--thus every penguin is surrounded by four albatrosses, and each albatross by a like number of penguins." (Pym, p.835)

It is a net and an order in which Pym is similarly caught. He too flies out to sea, but always rebounds to the relative safety of a vessel. His only freedom lies in reflection upon his incarceration

and that he never does. Even while describing his sufferings, he has no insight into their significance. Indeed, Pym denies the possibility of comprehension; ". . . but it is utterly useless to form conjectures where all is involved, and will, no doubt, remain for ever involved, in the most appalling and unfathomable mystery." (Pym, p.811)

(ii)

One cannot say that the fisherman understands the "mystery"; he does not make any attempt at interpretation of the facts although he is able to assess his situation with a kind of Democrition--or Dupin-like --perception. He accurately states his condition as they enter the whirlpool, "But we were . . . rid of these annoyances--just as death-condemned felons in prison are allowed petty indulgences, forbidden them while their doom is yet uncertain." Moreover, he acknowledges his own errors, ". . . the fact of my invariable miscalculation, set me upon a train of reflection that made my limbs again tremble. . . ." ("Maelström", pp.136, 138)

A maze of deception is wound about him though. On the day of the hurricane, the weather is mild and the sky clear. ("Maelström", p.132) After the death of the youngest brother, the fisherman sees his elder

brother and his "heart leaped for joy, for [he] had made sure that he was overboard--but the next moment all this joy was turned into horror . . ." ("Maelström", p.133) as he learns of their predicament. The next misunderstanding is again revealed by the brother as the fisherman looks at his watch which had stopped. The fisherman also remembers his mental confusion during the storm as they enter the whirl, and the feeling of delirium as he watches the behaviour of various objects caught like himself. The same sense of miscalculation is stressed when the boat begins its descent. "How often we made the circuit of the belt it is impossible to say . . . . As I felt the sickening sweep of the descent . . . I expected instant destruction . . . But moment after moment elapsed. I still lived." ("Maelström", p.136) Even its actual position is ambiguous: "The boat appeared to be hanging, as if by magic. . . ." ("Maelström, p. 136)

The difference between the fisherman and the other narrators lies in the fisherman's ability to recognize deception, to act upon his observations and finally in the courage he exhibits.

The narrator of "MS." is also deceived, an ironic condition, in that his ". . . rigid thoughts enabled me to detect their [German moralists] falsities." ("MS.", p.118) For one who possesses a strong

relish for physical philosophy, the narrator witnesses an extraordinary number of miracles: "By what miracle I escaped destruction, it is impossible to say." "The swell surpassed anything I had imagined possible, and that we were not instantly buried is a miracle." "It appears to me a miracle of miracles that our enormous bulk is not swallowed up at once and forever." ("MS.", pp.119,121,124)

In fact, the narrator is almost always deceived. As the simoon approaches, he notes the "transparency" of the water: "Although I could distinctly see the bottom, yet, heaving the lead, I found the ship in fifteen fathoms." ("MS.", p.119) Though the survivors expect imminent destruction, ". . . this very just apprehension seemed by no means likely to be soon verified." ("MS.", p.120) The sun rises, yet sheds "no decisive light". ("MS."; p.120) On board the second ship, the narrator conceals himself unnecessarily. Finally, he succumbs to faith in the supernatural: "Perhaps this current leads us to the southern pole itself. It must be confessed that a supposition apparently so wild has every probability in its favor." ("MS.", p.125)

The theme of deception is probably the most worrisome to the critic who attempts to file Pym neatly. Since the physical reality of any incident is dubious and the realm of hallucination deliberately

stretched, no line of the narrative can necessarily be accepted at face-value. Pym, who generally abstains from deliberate prevarication, does deceive his family about his intentions of going to sea. He even cruelly teases his elderly grandfather who almost recognizes him.

In the "Introductory Note", the problem of appearance and reality is presented, ". . . I feared I should not be able to write, from mere memory, a statement so minute and connected as to have the appearance of that truth it would really possess. . . ." (Pym, p.748) While Pym is a fable, it is offered as a record of an actual adventure by Poe. Pym, however, originally presents it as a fiction while professing it to be true. Neither can one ignore the phenomenal number of constructions like, "it seemed", or "it appeared" rather than "it was". Also significant are Pym's frequent lapses into "insensibility" or delirium since his reports of these times would be necessarily affected by the quality of his perception. In the dream or in madness, one perceives truth. Poe dedicates Eureka "to the dreamers and those who put their faith in dreams as in the only realities." ("Preface to Eureka")

Pre-voyage behaviour sets the example for Pym's later attitudes. "The intense hypocrisy . . . pervading every word and action of my life . . . could

only have been rendered tolerable to myself by the wild and burning expectation . . . of my long cherished visions of travel." (Pym, p.758) Later, in the scuffle with the mutineers, Pym stands inactive allowing his dog to act out his role. With reference to the cannibalism, Pym protests, but as Bezanson points out, "The consistently amoral Pym is really less terrified at the prospect of eating human flesh than of being eaten."[47] In order to cope with his fear, Pym identifies with a "tiger" rather than a man. And, even though he could have abstained, Pym partakes of the human meal without further hesitation.[48]

The instances of mistaken identity are numerous. Pym masquerades as the corpse of Hartman Rogers, thereby frightening the mate literally to death. The ship he sights from the wreck of the Grampus is not bringing deliverance, rather it is a vivid tableau of death: the man who appears to smile invitingly is really a leering corpse. Pym, however, warns the reader about the nature of this incident: "I relate these things and circumstances minutely, and I relate them, it must be understood, precisely as they appeared to us." (Pym, p. 809)

[47] Bezanson, p. 166.

[48] See also Halliburton's interpretation of Pym's fear of cannibalism, p. 266.

Pym later accepts the dead crew's function as his own when he is buried in Tsalal. ". . . 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, pp. 861-62). Another instance of misapprehension is Pym's first dream in which he thinks his dog Tiger a raging lion, but really the dog is showing affection. Later, however, Tiger does go mad and attacks Pym in earnest.

Peters too plays several roles. Supposedly one of the mutineers, he assists Augustus and Pym. Treated as an "ignorant half-breed", he shows surprisingly astute judgment of the hieroglyphs.[49] Even the flora and fauna of an area fall under the conflict between appearance and reality. Desolation Island is an example of the conspiracy of plants: ". . . the sides of most of the hills . . . are clothed with very brilliant verdure. This deceitful appearance is caused by a small plant resembling saxifrage . . ." (Pym, p.833)

As has been noted by Joel Porte, the rookery might also be a form of deception; albatross is a species of "gull".[50] As well, their nesting

[49] See Pym, p.873.

[50] Joel Porte, The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville and James (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), p. 92.

arrangements with the penguins would seem to create an optical illusion. It is true too, that a "guy" is often a dupe and that word appears in the name, the Jane Guy.

Chapters XIV to XVII of the narrative offer a complicated array of contradictory descriptions of the South Pole by different explorers--none of whom are correct, the search for the Auroras being a case in point.

The singularity of the waters of Tsalal has been remarked upon elsewhere. However, Pym's uncertainty about their real nature implies that it is variable. Pym considers that Tsalal is the epitome of deception, in any case. He writes ". . . difficulty in bringing ourselves to believe that their [the waters'] qualities were purely those of nature." And again: "It [the water] was, nevertheless, in point of fact, as perfectly limpid as any limestone water in existence, the difference being only in appearance." (Pym, p.852) The natives of Tsalal, the supposedly unspoiled innocents, engineer a sophisticated ambush, yet they too return to outward appearances in their burning of the Jane Guy. Much has already been said about the markings in the chasm, though the most interesting aspect is the contradictory interpretations they excite, a consequence set up by the editor (Poe) of Pym's narration.

Pym seems to have great difficulty recognising those closest to him. Once, he thinks that Parker is his dog, Tiger--a highly improbable delusion. Or, escaping from Tsalal, he fails to recognise either the voice or features of Peters. "But now there came a spinning of the brain; a shrill-sounding and phantom voice screamed within my ears; a dusky, fiendish, and filmy figure stood immediately beneath me : . . . ." (Pym, p.875)

Of course there is too the final paradox of warm winter and snow described as a "white ashy shower". Bezanson sees the powerful current as dream metaphor[51] and this passage as explicitly visionary. Perception becomes as vague as the occupants of the canoe are listless. "The summit of the cataract was utterly lost in the dimness and distance." (Pym, p.882)

The last game Poe plays is in the concluding "Note" which suggests a completion of the narrative by one means or another. Peters will be unable to furnish any version at all since he only exists in relationship to Pym and Pym has died. Moreover, Pym's Tsalal and his vision is as elusive as the islands of the Auroras; they all only exist in the narrative, in Pym/Poe's imagination. The regions can only be found through the proper perceptual and mystical preparation,

51 Bezanson, p. 171.

which is the reading of the narrative. However, this is not to say the voyages lack dream-reality.

(iii)

The last theme to be discussed is that of cancellation--or the collapse of opposites. O'Donnell sees Pym as the fictional predecessor of Eureka. Although it might seem dangerous to apply a writer's later philosophy to earlier fiction, it is also extremely difficult--if not perverse--not to see this as a developing concept behind all Poe's work.

While parallels, dualities and cancellations form the thematic and structural basis for Pym, the shorter tales rely more heavily on circular imagery, than on the theme of cancellation. The primary evidence of this theme is found in the "Note" tacked on at the end of the story where "the maps of Mercator" suggest a collapse of water and land: ". . . the ocean is represented as rushing, by four mouths into the (northern) Polar Gulf, to be absorbed into the bowels of the earth. . . ." ("MS.", p.126) With the "black rock", or "wall of the universe"[52] as landmark, it would seem that the philosopher has found the northern pole, though he insists that the "current leads to the southern pole". If the Poles of the earth

[52] Cf. "MS.", pp. 125 and 126.

have collapsed, then the universe is in the process of retreating upon itself.[53]

"Maelström" similarly tends to avoid the obvious constructions of cancellation found in Pym. The whirl functions much like the ever-changing universe in that it destroys that which falls within it, only to return the debris to the surface--that is, the material is not annihilated; rather it is returned in altered forms. One of the descriptions of the Moskoe-ström bears comparison with the "Note" in "MS." ". . . in the centre of the channel of the maelström is an abyss penetrating the globe, and issuing in some very remote part--the Gulf of Bothnia . . . ." ("Maelström", p.130)

Halliburton's analysis of the significance of the southern pole should be added here. "The southern Pole stands as the ultimate space within the realm of human time, ultimate but not final, for the episode of descent is open-ended. It does not end time; it mediates between the old time and new, "timeless" time that can be known only in the condition of pure novelty. It is an episode because it appears, in a mediate position, between the now and the then; it is a process broken off, an arrested interval . . . ."[54]

[53] See Poe's definition of "Universe", Eureka, p. 186.

[54] Halliburton, p. 256.

Since other critics have amply listed the parallel incidents in Pym, this discussion will be confined to scenes which combine most of the thought and imagery of the entire work. The first then, is Pym's encounter with the ghost ship, that acts as a prelude to the reversal of the Grampus. The former is described as a "hermaphrodite brig", that is, a composite of male and female principles. (The barnacles which offer them sustenance, also happen to be hermaphrodite growths.) As male and female, positive and negative, attraction and repulsion are all ways in which Poe defines cosmic process, this can hardly be an incidental description.

The fore-warning of cannibalism figures in this analysis. The reunion and dispersal of Oneness can be seen as the universe ingesting and regurgitating itself; all consumption therefore is cannibalistic in imitation. To devour is to preserve identity, to maintain singularity; to be eaten is to be subsumed, to identify with the diffused particles. Pym's fear centres about his need to be the controlling ego--indeed the only entity since all else must endure refraction and scattering. The gull conveys a warning and an offer to the ship-wrecked men. It drops the human meat at Parker's feet, inviting the men to partake in a death-feast. Though they actually butcher Parker later, they have shared symbolically in the

bird's repast. Like it, they "lay in a condition of stupid lethargy".[55] The gull gnaws at the back of the dead seaman; Peters stabs Parker in the back.

Shortly after the incident of cannibalism, Augustus dies, leaving Pym and Peters alone so that the second half of the story can be enacted. It may be coincidental, but Pym's alter-ego, Augustus, shares the first letter of his first name: Augustus and Arthur. In the last half, Pym and Peters share the first letter of their surnames. If Gordon is indeed a reference to the Gordian knot, then it would function as the link between Pym's two subservient personalities.

The overturning of the hull of the Grampus forms the structural centre of the novel; not only is the course of action affected by the rescue on the Jane Guy, Pym and Peters undergo personality alterations. Moreover, the voyage becomes explicitly dream-like. Pym is immersed in death and in new life.

The scene which recalls the birth imagery of the Ariel incident also suggests the double perspective. Although the ship still drifts southward, Pym is thrown from windward to leeward. This is related to the colour imagery mentioned earlier, the Northern Lights, which Pym sees in the Antarctic. The trip to the south

55 Compare Pym, pp. 810 and 819.

is a voyage to extremity. In Poe's universe, the point of extremity immediately precedes the point of collapse. Pym notes that, "So far, we had found the Antarctic, like the Arctic Ocean, peculiarly free from violent storms . . . ." (Pym, p.879) The equator marks the fold-line of Pym's globe. Davidson sees the motion as temporal as well: "If Pym's quest is for selfhood, for first principles and primal being, it is also a moving backward through the natural order as it presently exists and into the world's original condition, as primal first cause. Pym moves not only through space and idea but also backward through time."[56] However, the voyage neither proceeds nor recedes in that particular sense. Rather, the movement is that of the heart-beat with Pym thrown from beat to stop to beat. The final calm is the pause between violent motions; it is the revelation beyond words, the closest Pym comes to epiphany or climax.[57]

Times of intense colour or activity in Poe are processes. Realization is attained past the point of extremity, in unity, in whiteness, in unconscious

[56] Davidson, p. 178.

[57] It should be noted, however, that elsewhere Poe achieves a more successful use of this technique: "The Fall of the House of Usher," for example. The climax of Pym is both under-powered and overshadowed by the games of deception Poe plays.

passivity. The Primal Ego possesses awareness and knowledge only in the absence of motion, that is in singularity. However, this state, while recurrent, can never be static. "In the Original Unity of the First Thing lies the Secondary Cause of All Things, with the Germ of their Inevitable Annihilation." (Eureka, p.185)

Pym, a particle of Poe's mind, is created, acts out his cycle and is finally re-integrated into the originating personality--thus the parenthetical "Note". The revelation Kaplan describes[58] exists only as a bridge between the reader and Poe. Pym is not only a hypocritical Lemuel Gulliver; he is also like that other creation, a dupe of his creator. But the message which Poe attempts to offer here and in Eureka is more positive. In Hoffman's words: "Death is personal extinction, the obliteration of this particular bundle of sensations and memories, and therefore terrifying. Death is also deliverance from the memories and sensations in which this particular person, this particular combination of atoms divided from the unity whence they came, is imprisoned--and thus death is welcome. Death is the necessitous apocalypse in which all divided creation hurtles toward instantaneous reunion

58 Sydney Kaplan, "An Introduction to Pym" from Poe, Robert Regan ed., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., "Twentieth Century Views" Prentice-Hall Inc., 1967, pp.159-60.

in the oneness from which it had been sundered. Thus death, the most feared, is also the bringer of deliverance in a metapersonal ecstasy."[59]

[59] Hoffman, p. 263.

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