

Flight into Fancy:

Poe's Discovery of the Right Brain

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This article originally appeared in *The Southern Literary Journal* 33:2, 2001

"Phrenology is no longer to be laughed at," Edgar Allan Poe wrote in an 1836 review of *Phrenology, and the Moral Influence of Phrenology*. "It is no longer laughed at by men of common understanding. It has assumed the majesty of science; and, as a science, ranks among the most important which can engage the attention of thinking beings" (*Essays and Reviews* 329). Poe, of course, counted himself among these "thinking beings" and continued to be engaged by phrenology, which located various "faculties" such as "amativeness" and "cautiousness" in different parts of the brain. In a letter written in 1841, for example, Poe says that his head "has been examined by several phrenologists" (Thomas 345). Indeed, Poe's interest in phrenology was probably behind his discussion of the mind in his critical writing and detective fiction. In "The Poetic Principle" he divides the mind into "the Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense" (*Essays and Reviews* 272), and the narrator of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" speaks of "the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul" and of "a double Dupin--the creative and the resolvent" (*Poetry and Tales* 402).

What separates Poe from the phrenologists, who were right in conceiving of a divided brain but wrong in labeling its parts, is his keen understanding of a particular region of the mind. In a letter he wrote to Philip Pendleton Cooke in 1846, Poe says, "But, seriously, I do not think that any one so well enters into the poetical portion of my mind as yourself" (Quinn 514-515). Poe does not go on to say what he means by the "poetical portion" of his brain, but the rest of his writing contains several telling descriptions of an exotic region of the mind. These descriptions show that Poe correctly identified what modern neurologists call the right hemisphere of the brain, or simply the "right brain." That is, while he may not have pinpointed its location in the skull, Poe conceived of a mental region remote from ordinary consciousness and characterized by nonverbal forms of thought--specifically visual imagery, music, and emotion. He also understood that this region finds expression in dreams and in destructive urges.

The work that best illustrates Poe's awareness of the right brain is *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. Here, as he had earlier in "MS. Found in a Bottle" and would later in "Landor's Cottage," Poe describes a journey into the mind and the discovery of an exotic region where language and other elements of ordinary consciousness give way to vivid, often surreal images, potent emotions, and destructive urges. Situated at the beginning of his most creative period--the period of "William Wilson," "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher," "The Masque of the Red Death," "The Raven," "Ulalume," and almost all of Poe's other masterworks--*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* thus provides a clue to the secret of the author's genius. In describing his discovery of the right brain, it reveals the source that he tapped to create his most imaginative work.

On first glance, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* seems merely another one of Poe's flights of fancy. A decade or so earlier, in poems such as "Dreams" and "Romance," he had expressed a longing for escape away from "dull reality" and into "forbidden things." As Henri Le Rennet and Edgar A. Perry, he actually had indulged this longing by leaving home and going briefly to sea. In *Pym*, it may seem, Poe simply donned another pseudonym and again "set boldly out to sea," this time on a wholly fictional journey. After all, the protagonist's identity with the author cannot be doubted; "Pym" is simply a compression of "pseudonym," and, as Kenneth Silverman points out, character and author share many similarities, including their names, families, and nativity in Massachusetts (135). Unlike Poe's earlier flights, however, this one is actually a flight *into* fancy, a voyage of discovery in which a man travels not outward but inward, deep into the recesses of his own mind and specifically into the realm of imagination.

The goal of discovery is clear both in the source material Poe used to construct his fictional narrative and in the language of the narrative itself. For example, J. Lasley Dameron has argued that Poe mined material for *Pym* from William Scoresby, Jr.'s *Journal of a Voyage to the Northern Whale-Fishery; Including Researches and Discoveries on the Eastern Coast of West Greenland* (1823). Dameron shows that Poe referred to Scoresby twice in his writing and points out that Pym and Scoresby describe similar discoveries, including colorfully streaked water, a strange celestial phenomenon, colorless particles coming from the sky, and a white human figure witnessed in a desolate area. Furthermore, Harold Beaver has shown that Poe was keenly interested in the work of Jeremiah Reynolds, an American explorer whose "American Antarctic Exploring Expedition" sought to test John Cleves Symmes' theory of a hollow earth (13-14). This interest in one explorer and apparent imitation of another suggest that Poe conceived of Pym's voyage as one of discovery. Pym's own words make the same case. Of his arrival at the island of the Wampooos, for example, Pym says, "At every step we took inland the conviction forced itself upon us that we were in a country differing essentially from any hitherto visited by civilized men. We saw nothing with which we had been formerly conversant" (*Poetry and Tales* 1140). After a disastrous experience on this island, Pym goes farther south and makes more discoveries, of which he writes, "Many unusual phenomena now indicated that we were entering upon a region of novelty and wonder" (1176). These descriptions of a character's entrance into unfamiliar regions echo an earlier story of discovery, Poe's "MS. Found in a Bottle," in which a seafaring narrator speaks of "hurrying onwards to some exciting knowledge" (*Poetry and Tales* 198) and proclaims, "A new sense--a new entity is added to my soul" (195). Indeed, the word "discovery" mysteriously appears on a sail that the narrator has accidentally dabbed with tar (195). Thus, the language of both stories, coupled with these apparent sources of *Pym*, suggests that Poe was interested more in discovery than in departure.

The destination of this voyage of discovery, however, is not outside but inside the narrator. For example, it is significant that Pym spends the better portion of his voyage actually entrapped somewhere--in the hold of the *Grampus*, in a casket-like box, on a useless ship surrounded by water, on an island, on a hill, inside caverns. The paradox of traveling while trapped suggests a journey of the mind, which can go anywhere while remaining inside the skull. In Beaver's words, "this voyage out proves only another flight within" (9). Furthermore, John Irwin has argued that the figure Pym encounters at the end of the novel is his own shadow. If this reading is correct--and Pym's numerous references to reflection certainly support it--then it provides further evidence that Pym's true destination is something within himself. Even Poe's fascination with Reynolds' and Symmes' theory of a hollow earth reflects an interest in internal discovery. Finally, several key details in Pym's account suggest that the only place this story could have taken place is his own mind. For instance, describing Augustus's resolution to abandon him in the hold, Pym writes, "Many years elapsed, however, before I was aware of this fact. A natural shame and regret for his weakness and indecision prevented Augustus from confiding to me at once what a more intimate and unreserved communion afterward induced him to reveal" (*Poetry and Tales* 1052). Augustus dies less than two months into the voyage, making Pym's statement a flat contradiction, at least in material reality. Moreover, Pym's almost perfectly accurate "visions" of all that will occur to him on his voyage--that is, "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"--may be extraordinary premonitions, but are better explained as wishes that Pym then fulfills because the voyage takes place in his own mind, which he controls. In fact, Pym refers to the mind's ability to create situations when he describes descending the cliff on the island of the Wampooos: "And now I found these fancies creating their own realities, and all imagined horrors crowding upon me in fact" (1170). Finally, it is significant that Pym occasionally hints that his adventures are imaginary. In his preface to the narrative, he alludes to the "positively marvellous" nature of his story and admits that most readers will regard it as "merely an impudent and ingenious fiction" (1007). Later, after describing the time he spent on the disabled *Grampus*, he admits that he and Peters "began to remember what had passed rather as a frightful dream from which we had been happily awakened, than as events which had taken place in sober and naked reality" (1114). These references to the unreal and the surreal plant the idea that the basis for Pym's story is not material reality but mental reality, or "ingenious fiction."

If Pym's voyage is indeed one of discovery and his destination is indeed a portion of his own mind, the only remaining question is what he finds there. In its remoteness and elusiveness, the realm that Poe

describes here and elsewhere resembles a suppressed part of the mind. Thus, Beaver's characterization of Pym--"the fantastic, irrational, subconscious mind" (27)--can be extended to cover the entire realm Pym explores. To obtain access to this realm, for example, he must defy authority figures. First, he tricks his parents and grandfather in order to get aboard the *Grampus*. Later, when low fuel and signs of scurvy provide reasons to turn around, Pym persuades Captain Guy to continue sailing south. These instances of overcoming the guard to reach the guarded suggest the act of circumventing the conscious mind to reach the subconscious mind. Furthermore, Pym's description of diving into the *Grampus*'s submerged hold to retrieve rations suggests a penetration of the surface to reach a remote place. The sketch "Landor's Cottage" is helpful for understanding Poe's conception of a remote mental region. "The land undulated very remarkably," the narrator reports of his journey to an exotic place, "and my path, for the last hour, had wound about and about so confusedly, in its effort to keep in the valleys, that I no longer knew in what direction lay the sweet village of B--, where I had determined to stop for the night" (*Poetry and Tales* 886). It is perhaps significant that the name of the village to which the narrator is traveling is "B--," which may stand for "brain." More important is the narrator's characterization of the journey in this region as tortuous. Even seeing is difficult, the narrator indicates, for a "smoky mist, resembling that of the Indian summer, enveloped all things, and, of course, added to my uncertainty" (886).

The remoteness of the interior realm Poe explores in these stories, then, suggests that it is a region separate from the conscious mind--an uncharted place that needs to be reached via special means. Just such a place is the right brain, which researchers Rhawn Joseph and David Galin have characterized as a remote entity akin to the unconscious mind. The best evidence that the realm Poe describes corresponds to the right brain, however, lies in the features these regions share. These features--a remoteness from ordinary language and time, striking visual and sometimes surreal imagery, a capacity for arousing emotions, and finally impulses toward self-destruction--all suggest that what Pym and Poe discover is not the South Pole, but the right brain.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the realm Pym discovers is its remoteness from two elements that generally characterize the known, everyday world he has left: language and time. In this way, Pym's realm closely resembles the right brain, which has little or no capacity for processing linguistic or other kinds of sequential information. The faculties that handle these types of information are located in the left brain. Indeed, the left brain's control of language is the most firmly established case of lateralization, and scientific evidence goes back to the 1830s, when French doctor Marc Dax reported on a link between aphasia and damage to the left brain.

Language suffers an almost complete breakdown when Pym enters the exotic realm he describes in his narrative. For example, Pym continually is struck dumb in this world. When he wakes up under a "monster," which turns out to be his own dog, Pym finds himself unable to speak: "Had a thousand lives hung upon the movement of a limb or the utterance of a syllable, I could have neither stirred nor spoken" (*Poetry and Tales* 1026). Language again fails Pym when he hears Augustus calling him in the hold:

My powers of speech totally failed, and, in an agony of terror lest my friend should conclude me dead, and return without attempting to reach me, I stood up between the crates near the door of the box, trembling convulsively, and gasping and struggling for utterance. Had a thousand worlds depended upon a syllable, I could not have spoken it.
(1038)

It is noteworthy that what eventually saves Pym in this second situation is not language, which breaks down in this realm, but a sound that Pym compares to music: he drops his knife, which makes a "rattling sound" as it hits the floor. He writes, "Never did any strain of the richest melody come so sweetly to my ears" (1039). Unlike language, music has a place in the right brain and, as this incident suggests, in the realm Pym explores.

Pym is not the only character who struggles with language in his narrative. When a brig approaches the *Grampus*, which has been disabled by a storm, all of the stranded sailors become dumb or incoherent. Augustus, who first sees the ship, merely stares without saying a word. Pym becomes "unable to

articulate a syllable," while Peters "danced about the deck like a madman, uttering the most extravagant rhodomontades, intermingled with howls and imprecations," and Parker merely weeps (*Poetry and Tales* 1084). Later, Pym notes that his companions became delirious and "talked incoherently" (1089).

Of course, language does not disappear altogether. Characters continue to communicate with one another over the course of the narrative. What is striking, however, is how little of this communication actually appears in Pym's narrative. While Pym occasionally reports that Augustus "requested" or that Peters "declared," he almost never records any of his or his companions' actual words. For a novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* contains remarkably few quotations. In the context of this eerie silence, it is significant that one of the only instances of quoted speech is immediately stifled. At his reunion with his friend after several days in the hold, Pym cries, "Augustus! oh Augustus!"--to which Augustus immediately replies, "Hush--for God's sake be silent!" (*Poetry and Tales* 1039).

Even attempts at written language are doomed in this realm. For example, the darkness of the hold nearly renders Augustus's note to Pym useless. Indeed, the first thing Pym sees when he uses phosphorous to illuminate the note is "nothing but a dreary and unsatisfactory blank" (*Poetry and Tales* 1033). Even after he realizes that he has examined the wrong side of the paper and repeats the procedure, he succeeds in reading only part of the note. Furthermore, much of the note's effect on Pym lies not in the meaning produced by the syntactical or denotative components of language, but in something beneath the words. Pym says:

And '*blood*' too, that word of all words--so rife at all times with mystery, and suffering, and terror--how trebly full of import did it now appear--how chillily and heavily (disjointed, as it thus was, from any foregoing words to qualify or render it distinct) did its vague syllables fall, amid the deep gloom of my prison, into the innermost recesses of my soul! (1035)

Thus, the isolation of the word from a linguistic context makes it all the more powerful. Another doomed piece of writing is the letter that Captain Guy carries onto the island of the Wampooos. A "sealed letter" that is placed inside a bottle and then carried up to a tall peak, this written communication is even more separated from the outside world than the manuscript of "MS. Found in a Bottle." The chances that this letter will find an audience are remote indeed.

Yet another sign that language has a limited role in this realm is Pym's struggle as narrator to translate the impressions of this world into words. Pym's narrative is littered with references to the impotence of words: "indescribable feeling of dread" (*Poetry and Tales* 1011), "disaster the most unspeakable" (1035), "indefinable horror" (1035), "indescribable comfort" (1089), "loathsome beyond expression" (1107), "indescribable state of weakness and horror" (1091), and astonishment "far too deep for words" (1138). At one point, Pym writes, "The night was as dark as it could possibly be, and the horrible shrieking din and confusion which surrounded us it is useless to attempt describing" (1077). At another, he says, "Of a sudden, and all at once, there came wafted over the ocean from the strange vessel . . . a smell, a stench, such as the world has no name for" (1085). Similar phrases appear when the narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle" struggles to describe his experience in the strange realm he explored. He says, "A feeling, for which I have no name, has taken possession of my soul" (*Poetry and Tales* 191) and, "What she is not, I can easily perceive; what she is, I fear it is impossible to say" (196). He further complains that "the words tornado and simoon are trivial and ineffective" to describe the storm he encountered (198). These elements and the feelings they arouse are resistant to verbal language because they originate in a realm where such language is all but nonexistent.

Finally, as J. Gerald Kennedy has pointed out, even the peculiar emphasis on putrescence in the novel points up the impotence of words because putrescence, by challenging the human capacity for verbal description, illuminates the distance between objects and language. Kennedy writes:

Through decomposition, Poe calls attention to the provisional nature of language and hints through his hoaxical narrative that all discourse participates in the archetypal hoax

which assumes that language confers mastery or control over the phenomena which it names. By resisting such domestication, *pourriture* exposes that branch concealed by the hoax of language. (173)

Thus, the disgusting scenes encountered in this realm also lead to a breakdown of language.

The realm explored in *Pym* lacks not only ordinary language, but also ordinary time. The first sign that Pym has entered a realm outside ordinary time comes, significantly, immediately after the *Grampus* has gone to sea. Pym reports waking up from a slumber and then says, "Striking a light, I looked at the watch; but it was run down, and there were, consequently, no means of determining how long I slept" (*Poetry and Tales* 1024). Trapped in the hold without access to another clock or even a view of the sun, Pym has lost touch with standard time for good. All he can do now is wind his watch again and hope to keep track of relative time. Again, however, the watch runs down, and Pym reports that it is "impossible to say" how long he slept the second time. This time, he neglects winding the watch and thus loses touch with time altogether while he is in the hold. After Augustus rescues him, Pym seems to reestablish a connection with time and meticulously records the days as they pass. One of the first of these days is June 30, which he says is the thirteenth since the ship left Nantucket. Even this apparent grasp of time is undercut, however, by Pym's strange remark that Augustus, who he later reports died on August 1, spoke to him "years" later (1052). This comment suggests not only that this voyage is taking place inside Pym's mind, but that it is occurring in a particular part of Pym's mind--the right brain, which does not process sequential information.

This setting of Pym's tale in a place somehow separated from time has parallels in Poe's other works, most notably in "Dream-Land," in which the narrator visits "a wild weird clime that lieth, sublime, / Out of space--out of time" (*Poetry and Tales* 79). The narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle" enters such a realm when he goes to sea. A storm strikes his ship, and he is left with "no means of calculating time" (*Poetry and Tales* 192). In "The Masque of the Red Death," time appears as an external enemy that threatens to destroy the remote world Prince Prospero and his revelers have created for themselves. When they hear the chimes of a giant clock, Poe writes, the players in the orchestra stop playing, dancers stop dancing, "the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation" (*Poetry and Tales* 487). These descriptions of characters who try to escape time or simply lose track of it all suggest that the realm Poe was attempting to depict is the "timeless" world of the right brain.

What, then, if not the familiar elements of language and time found in the known world, does Pym discover in this remote region? The answer can be summarized as what Christopher Smith has called the "psychological exotic." Visual, often surreal, imagery combines with emotions and peculiar self-destructive urges in this realm, just as all of these elements characterize the thinking done in the right brain. Researcher Joseph Hellige has pointed out that the right hemisphere's role in processing visuospatial information and emotion is well-documented (28). David Galin has suggested that the right brain also plays an important part in dreaming (577), and other researchers share this belief (Springer and Deutsch 261). Finally, Rhawn Joseph has associated the right brain with self-destructive behavior (4).

Visual imagery is vivid and potent in the realm of *Pym*. In describing his later remembrance of his first adventure at sea on the *Ariel*, for instance, Pym turns immediately to the language of visual information: "This short period proved amply long enough to erase from my memory the shadows, and bring out in vivid light all the pleasurable exciting points of colour, all the picturesqueness of the late perilous accident" (*Poetry and Tales* 1018). Pym's later adventures on the *Grampus* and the *Jane Guy* clearly affect him in the same way, for the remainder of his narrative relies heavily on visual imagery. For example, he packs his description of the mysterious sailor on the Dutch brig with vivid visual details:

This last was a stout and tall man, with a very dark skin. He seemed by his manner to be encouraging us to have patience, nodding to us in a cheerful although rather odd way, and smiling constantly so as to display a set of the most brilliantly white teeth. As his vessel drew nearer, we saw a red flannel cap which he had on fall from his head into the water;

but of this he took little or no notice, continuing his odd smiles and gesticulations. I relate these things and circumstances minutely, and I relate them, it must be understood, precisely as they *appeared* to us. (1085)

This emphasis on visual details--the "stout and tall man," his "very dark skin," his "brilliantly white teeth," the "red flannel cap," his "odd smiles and gesticulations"--shows the strong impression that the visual material of this realm makes on a visitor. Moreover, Pym's careful distinction between the information that "*appeared*" to him and the reality of the situation shows that visual information can take precedence over reality. An even stronger visual impression accosts Pym when he gets closer to the mysterious sailor: "On his back, from which a portion of the shirt had been torn, leaving it bare, there sat a huge seagull, busily gorging itself with the horrible flesh, its bill and talons deep buried, and its white plumage spattered all over with blood" (1086). Other striking visual images include those of the sailor's face--"Never, surely, was any object so terribly full of awe!" (1087)--and of Augustus's deteriorated corpse, which was "loathsome beyond expression" (1107). Even Pym's peculiar excursus on the nesting habits of albatrosses and penguins may be part of this realm's visual imagery. John Irwin has shown that the pattern Pym describes is that of the quincuncial network. Anyone familiar with this widely known pattern, then, would have recognized in Pym's description yet another visual image.

Visual imagery is likewise a striking component of the realms Poe's narrators explore in "Landor's Cottage" and "MS. Found in a Bottle." The former, in fact, is little more than an elaborate verbal painting. After minutely describing a picturesque valley, a stream, an impressive tree, and finally Landor's Cottage itself, the narrator of the sketch announces, "It is not the purpose of this paper to do more than give, in detail, a picture of Mr. Landor's residence--as *I found it*" (*Poetry and Tales* 897). In "MS. Found in a Bottle," the narrator confronts an electrifying sight:

We were at the bottom of one of these abysses, when 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 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. Casting my eyes upwards, I beheld a spectacle which froze the current of my blood.
(*Poetry and Tales* 193)

After explaining that this "spectacle" was that of a huge ship, the narrator goes on to record more vivid visual details: "Her huge hull was 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 their polished surfaces the fires of innumerable battle-lanterns, which swung to and fro about her rigging" (193). The vividness of these images is not all that is striking in these passages. It is significant, for example, that the narrator says these images "froze the current" of his blood, for this admission reveals the potency of the images encountered in this realm. Furthermore, the companion's insistent cries of "see! see!" not only elevate the sense of sight to a level of great importance, but suggest the equivalency of sight and their setting: "see" and "sea" are homophones. In "starting boldly out to sea" (*Poetry and Tales* 1010), then, both Pym and this narrator have started boldly out to see.

What these characters see is not only potent, but often surreal. Indeed, Pym encounters many of these scenes while he is in a dream state. While alone in the hull, for example, he falls into a "profound sleep, or rather stupor" (*Poetry and Tales* 1026) and confronts a series of surreal images:

My dreams were of the most terrific description. Every species of calamity and horror befell me. Among other miseries, I was smothered to death between huge pillows, by demons of the most ghastly and ferocious aspect. Immense serpents held me in their embrace, and looked earnestly in my face with those fearfully shining eyes. Then deserts, limitless, and of the most forlorn and awe-inspiring character, spread themselves out before me. Immensely tall trunks of trees, gray and leafless, rose up in endless succession as far as the eye could reach. Their roots were concealed in wide-spreading morasses, whose dreary water lay intensely black, still, and altogether terrible, beneath. (1026)

Pym goes on to describe the "skeleton arms" of these trees, as well as the "wild eyes," "horrible teeth," and "red throat" of a lion he finds at his feet (1026). Pym undergoes a similar experience later when he and his companions are floating idly on their now-disabled ship: "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" (1079). In fact, much of the time that Pym spends in this realm is passed in some form of reverie. On their first adventure on the *Ariel*, for example, both he and Augustus become unconscious. While he is in the hold, Pym falls asleep for days at a time, and near the story's end he reports feeling "a numbness of body and mind--a dreaminess of sensation" as he, Peters, and the native Nu-Nu drift south (1178). These continual episodes of reverie establish a strong connection between this realm and the world of dreams, which is the world of the right brain.

Indeed, some of the incidents and scenes that Pym encounters while ostensibly awake and sober have a surreal quality. As Doug Mitchell has noted, the appearance of Pym's dog, Tiger, aboard a ship on which he has been stowed away for days resembles the illogical events of dreams. Even Pym says he could not at first explain the strange incident: "For the presence of Tiger I tried in vain to account; and after busying myself with a thousand different conjectures respecting him, was forced to content myself with rejoicing that he was with me to share my dreary solitude, and render me comfort by his caresses" (*Poetry and Tales* 1027). The second half of this passage suggests that the real source of Tiger is Pym's desire, which in dreams or reverie is sufficient basis for the appearance of animals or objects. The later explanation that Augustus brought the dog on board seems little more than the dreaming mind's attempt to account for the unaccountable. Moreover, it is significant that Tiger later disappears as abruptly and as inexplicably as he appeared. Similarly, the strange Dutch ghost ship taxes Pym's powers of explanation, finally forcing him to conclude "it is utterly useless to form conjectures where all is involved, and will, no doubt, remain forever involved, in the most appalling and unfathomable mystery" (1088). Equally mysterious is an incident involving another ship, which at first approaches the wrecked *Grampus* and then "all at once" shows its stern and moves in the opposite direction (1094). Finally, the colors that Pym encounters at the extreme of this realm are surreal. By the time he reaches the island of the Wampoops, the dominant shades are white, which is the color of the ice and the water, and black, which is the color of the natives and the earth. As Thomas Ollive Mabbott has pointed out in his discussion of "Dream-Land," which shows a similar pattern of colors, black and white are the colors of dreams for many people (342). The surreal quality of this realm, then, suggests that it is equivalent to the right brain, which plays an important part in dreaming.

This realm also shows a capacity for eliciting strong emotions. In fact, Pym more than once points out that this capacity dwarfs anything he has encountered in the ordinary world. For example, he begins the chapter on the Dutch brig in this way:

Shortly afterward an incident occurred which I am induced to look upon as more intensely productive of emotion, as far more replete with the extremes first of delight and then of horror, than even any of the thousand chances which afterward befell me in nine long years, crowded with events of the most startling, and, in many cases, of the most unconceived and unconceivable nature. (*Poetry and Tales* 1084)

Because Pym does not complete his narrative, which covers nine months, it is difficult to say how many of these "nine long years" were spent back in the ordinary world, but the editor's remark in the postscript that only two or three chapters remained to be written at the time of Pym's death strongly suggests that Pym is referring in this passage to time spent in the ordinary world. Thus, when compared with this ordinary world, the remote realm he has explored is "more intensely productive of emotion," at least in this case. But this is not the only such instance. Later, in describing the time he spent on the disabled *Grampus*, Pym says:

Thus, in my own case, I now feel it impossible to realize the full extent of the misery which I endured during the days spent upon the hulk. The incidents are remembered, but not the

feelings which the incidents elicited at the time of their occurrence. I only know that, when they did occur, I *then* thought human nature could sustain nothing more of agony. (1114)

Thus in writing his narrative in the ordinary world, Pym cannot feel the same emotions he experienced in the mysterious realm he explored. Again, that realm is more "productive of emotion." The particular brand of emotion he finds here is significant. Some research suggests that the right brain plays a particularly important role in negative emotions (Springer 172), and these are the feelings that predominate in the realm Pym depicts. In the preceding passage and others throughout the narrative, Pym uses words and phrases such as "intense agony of terror" (*Poetry and Tales* 1013), "calamity and horror" (1026), "extreme horror and dismay" (1030), "harrowing and yet indefinable horror" (1035), "appalling scene" (1097), "despair" (1109), and "agony" (1114) to describe the emotions he experienced. Of course, the reader of Pym's account requires no such labels to recognize the disturbing nature of this realm. Indeed, in the area of revulsion, J. Gerald Kennedy ranks *Pym* near the top of Poe's generally "morbid" oeuvre: "Except for the closing paragraph of 'The Facts in the Case of Monsieur Valdemar,' or perhaps the fiery violence of 'Hop Frog,' nothing else in Poe rivals *Pym* in its representation of disgusting scenes" (167). Finally, Pym's remark at the beginning of his narrative that he has an "enthusiastic temperament, and somewhat gloomy, although glowing imagination" (*Poetry and Tales* 1018), is a reminder that this realm is not an external place, but a region inside his own mind; Pym finds himself surrounded by horror, dismay, despair, and disgust because he has entered the seat of emotions, the right brain.

Another feature of this region that identifies it as the right brain is the urge toward self-destruction. Years after he published *Pym*, Poe returned to this subject in "The Black Cat" and "The Imp of the Perverse." In the latter, he defined "perverseness" as a "primitive impulse" to "do wrong for the wrong's sake" (*Poetry and Tales* 827). While in the realm described in his narrative, Pym experiences this impulse several times. When he realizes that he is running out of rations in the hold of the *Grampus*, for example, he abruptly exhausts what little he has left:

I now found my whole stock of provisions reduced to a single gill of liqueur. As this reflection crossed my mind, I felt myself actuated by one of those fits of perverseness which might be supposed to influence a spoiled child in similar circumstances, and, raising the bottle to my lips, I drained it to the last drop, and dashed it furiously upon the floor. (*Poetry and Tales* 1038)

Later, Pym finds himself clinging to the side of a cliff, indeed in a situation almost identical to one Poe describes in "The Imp of the Perverse." Again, he gives in to destructive impulses:

For one moment my fingers clutched convulsively upon their hold, while, with the movement, the faintest possible idea of ultimate escape wandered, like a shadow, through my mind--in the next my whole soul was pervaded with a *longing to fall*; a desire, a yearning, a passion utterly uncontrollable. I let go at once my grasp upon the peg, and, turning, half round from the precipice, remained tottering for an instant against its naked face. 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; and, sighing, I sunk down with a bursting heart, and plunged within its arms. (1170-1171)

The most interesting of these destructive impulses, however, is precisely the one that drives him to explore this realm. After barely surviving a hair-raising experience aboard the *Ariel*, Pym experiences an "ardent longing for the wild adventures incident to the life of the navigator" (1018). Augustus's accounts of suffering at sea only increase this yearning; Pym says, "It is strange, too, that he most strongly enlisted my feelings in behalf of the life of a seaman, when he depicted his more terrible moments of suffering and despair" (1018). After Pym goes to sea, this longing for danger continues to drive him. The climax comes when Pym--after surviving a mutiny and shipwreck on the *Grampus*, coping with sharks and starvation on a floating wreck, meeting a ghost ship, flirting with madness, eating a companion and watching another die, and narrowly escaping the treachery of the Wampoons on their island, all the while encountering

countless feelings of horror and despair--forges ahead with Peters and Nu-Nu toward the South Pole. The perverseness inherent in all of these actions resembles the kind of self-destructive behavior that has been associated with the right brain. In exploring it, Pym is exploring a region of his own mind.

The realm Pym describes resembles the right brain in yet another way. The danger in exploring a remote region is that one might never return home. What he finds in this exotic realm may prove so different that the explorer no longer can function in the ordinary world or so attractive that he no longer wishes to return home. In its remoteness from language and time and in its extraordinary taste for the surreal and self-destruction, the right brain poses such a threat--the threat of becoming lost in one's own mind.

The characters in *Pym* wage a constant battle with this threat. During his initial adventure on the *Ariel*, for example, Pym finds himself literally carried away:

I knew that I was altogether incapable of managing the boat, and that a fierce wind and strong ebb tide were hurrying us to destruction. A storm was evidently gathering behind us; we had neither compass nor provisions; and it was clear that, if we held our present course, we should be out of sight of land before daybreak. (*Poetry and Tales* 1012)

Since in this journey of the mind land represents familiar reality and the sea represents an exotic psychological realm, the real threat to Pym is that he will go mad. In fact, in the remainder of the narrative, Pym and others frequently flirt with madness. When he sees the Dutch brig approaching, Peters dances around "like a madman" (1084). Later, apparently sent into a delirium by the wine they have drunk, Pym's companions talk "incoherently," showing through their strange comments about Nantucket and fish scales a total ignorance of reality (1089-1090). Even Pym loses control of his faculties when he spots a second ship approaching theirs: "I was so affected by their conduct, as well as by what I now considered a sure prospect of deliverance, that I could not refrain from joining in with their madness, and gave way to the impulses of my gratitude and ecstasy by lying and rolling on the deck, clapping my hands, shouting, and other similar acts" (1094). Finally, Pym says of the sailors' psychological states near the end of this stint on the wreck: "it must be remembered that our intellects were so entirely disordered by the long course of privation and terror to which we had been subjected, that we could not justly be considered, at that period, in the light of rational beings" (1110).

Nonetheless, as Pym points out in the next passage, he and Peters did maintain their sanity: "In subsequent perils, nearly as great, if not greater, I bore up with fortitude against all the evils of my situation, and Peters, it will be seen, evinced a stoical philosophy nearly as incredible as his present childlike supineness and imbecility--the mental condition made the difference" (*Poetry and Tales* 1110). Thus, "mental condition" is not only the actual site of these adventures, but the means of remaining in control over the course of them. In other words, one remains in control during this psychological journey through concentration.

These numerous parallels in the realm Poe's characters explore and the region known as the right brain strongly suggest that Poe discovered this remote but potent portion of his own psyche. He did not stop there. His descriptions of this exotic realm show that Poe also came to see this region as a source of creativity. In *Pym* and "Landor's Cottage," his characters associate the region they are exploring with imagination or art.

In the preface to his narrative, for example, Pym places his adventures among those that exert "powerful influence in exciting the imaginative faculties" (*Poetry and Tales* 1007). Indeed, he goes on to say that these adventures already have provided the source for a piece of "pretended fiction" published under Edgar Allan Poe's name (1008). Furthermore, the name of the first ship on which Pym embarks is *Ariel*, an allusion to Shakespeare's figure of imagination in *The Tempest*. While Pym links his region to imagination, the narrator of "Landor's Cottage" goes a step further and associates his with art. At the beginning of the sketch, for example, he remarks that the neighborhood where he finds himself is "more picturesque than fertile" (*Poetry and Tales* 886). This distinction between the beautiful and the useful is

reminiscent of Poe's distinctions in "The Philosophy of Composition" between Beauty, which is the "sole legitimate province of the poem," and Truth, which "the true artist" will make subservient to beauty (*Essays and Reviews* 16-17). Thus, the beautiful but infertile region in which the narrator is traveling is suggestive of art. Moreover, the narrator consistently uses terms of art to describe the features of this region. In describing one impression he receives here, he refers to the effect created by "the concluding scene of some well-arranged theatrical spectacle or melodrama" (*Poetry and Tales* 888). He also compares a scene before him to an "amphitheatre" (889) and says the appearance of the cottage struck him "with the keenest sense of combined novelty and propriety--in a word of *poetry*" (892-893).

These connections between art and the exotic region he discovered in his mind suggest that Poe was not speaking idly when he wrote to Philip Pendleton Cooke of the "poetical portion" of his mind. Like the *Jane Guy's* crew, which sets out to harvest *biche de mer* from the island they discover, Poe saw the region he was exploring as a resource to be cultivated. Over the next decade, he would return to this resource many times, often obtaining access to his right brain by exploiting various states of consciousness, including hypnagogia and dreams. The result is a body of work that is often critical of language and time, but rich in visual imagery, surreal elements, music, emotional arousals, and references to self-destruction. Thus, the most creative period of Poe's career began with Pym's flight into fancy.

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