

2008

**“The Whole Numerous Race of the Melancholy among Men”:  
Mourning, Hypocrisy, and Same-Sex Desire in Poe's *Narrative of  
Arthur Gordon Pym***

David Greven  
*University of South Carolina - Columbia*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/engl\\_facpub](https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/engl_facpub)



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

**Publication Info**

Published in *Poe Studies*, Volume 41, Issue 1, 2008, pages 31-63.

This Article is brought to you by the English Language and Literatures, Department of at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [digres@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:digres@mailbox.sc.edu).

**“The Whole Numerous Race of the  
Melancholy among Men”:**  
*Mourning, Hypocrisy, and Same-Sex Desire in Poe’s  
Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*

DAVID GREVEN

Edgar Allan Poe’s construction of gender—one of the most provocative and complex aspects of his work—has proven richly suggestive for our critical forays into nineteenth-century theories and embodiments of gendered identity. Joan Dayan, in a powerful reading, locates Poe’s potential radicalism in his satirical representation of Southern codes that governed female sexual appraisal, while David Leverenz and Leland Person have seen social subversion in his portraits of the antebellum “gentleman.”<sup>1</sup> Extending these points, I argue that Poe is most culturally valuable in his representation of American manhood as fundamentally, intrinsically disorganized.<sup>2</sup> Poe’s 1838 novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* is important to studying representations of gender and sexuality in nineteenth-century literature because its most compelling scenes show masculine identities cut off from normative gendered standards. *Pym* presents us with numerous episodes in which masculine identity undergoes disturbing challenges or assaults, in which men behave oddly, disquietingly, or perversely, often with little or no emotional contextualization or explanation.

Some of Poe’s depictions have homoerotic overtones, and an exploration of their significance is the chief focus of this essay.<sup>3</sup> Given the extremely problematic nature of “proving” that homosexuality is being represented in an antebellum literary text, I propose that we investigate queer themes, not in scenes of sexual activity, but in depictions of failed gendered performance. It is in these fissures in prescribed codes of gendered conduct—precisely the moments in which normative gendered identity fails or, pushed to the breaking point, threatens to explode—that a queer potentiality lies.<sup>4</sup> Patrick E. Horrigan argues that fictive disaster narratives open up new avenues of possibility: “catastrophe,” he writes, “makes people free to discover capacities within themselves that were, until then, unimaginable.”<sup>5</sup> *Pym* exploits its staging of various nautical disasters—principally shipwrecks and mutinies—as opportunities for the disorganization of normative manhood.

Poe's evocations of sailing figure alternative forms of male identities cut off from what Michael Warner would call "regimes of the normal."<sup>6</sup> When Pym fantasizes about sea life, he does not envision progress, conquest, material gain, or grand adventure. Instead, he envisions shipwreck, famine, captivity, or "a lifetime dragged out in sorrow and tears, upon some gray and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown" (*Writings*, 1:65). This sense of male sorrow is suggestive. By transforming the sailing voyage from a masculinist venture for economic gain to a series of grueling opportunities for lonely, outcast men to share in a common grief, Poe denatures the expectations of both sea life and male identity.<sup>7</sup> Bert Bender, writing of the "prominent theme of brotherhood in American sea fiction," notes that it tells "typically American stories that bespeak our democratic heritage and a 'common faith,'" as we watch "men working together to survive" the hardships of "storm, shipwreck, and sometimes brutal authority," forming "a powerful cohesive force, a natural bonding in actual experience."<sup>8</sup> But in Poe there are only deepening states of debility. Infusing the homoeroticized atmosphere of the seaman's life with a heightened awareness of loneliness and despair, which eventually pours out in the uncontrollable flow of men's tears, Poe explodes the concept of sea life as an orderly, mutually affirming brotherhood, making it instead a site of excessiveness and erratic, fluctuating performances of masculine identity. As I will demonstrate, *Pym* is primarily a novel about male mourning. Understanding why men mourn, what they mourn, and for whom they mourn will help us to understand the novel's allegorical value for queer theory. And as I will also show, Poe's recurring theme of male debility echoes the language used by nineteenth-century health reformers who made the problem of male sexuality their chief focus; the correspondences between their rhetoric and Poe's novel are deeply suggestive for inquiries into the "nature" of gendered identity and same-sex desire in nineteenth-century American culture.

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville observed a "strange melancholy" in American men, so anxious to invent themselves in the era of self-made manhood.<sup>9</sup> A passage in Melville's 1846 novel *Typee*—which bears striking thematic similarities to *Pym*—anticipates the famous lists in Hawthorne and James when the first-person narrator, Tommo, itemizes the qualities lacking in Marquesan culture that are all too grievously present in American:

In their secluded abode of happiness there were no cross old women, no cruel step-dames, no withered spinsters, no love-sick maidens, no sour old bachelors, no inattentive husbands, no melancholy young

men, no blubbering youngsters, and no squalling brats. All was mirth, fun, and high good humor. Blue devils, hypochondria, and doleful dumps, went and hid themselves among the nooks and crannies of the rocks.<sup>10</sup>

This list of Western/American culture's ills, absent in the paradisiacal terrain of the Marquesas, is richly problematic, revealing, as it does, Tommo's considerable sexism, but what I wish to focus on is the figure of the "melancholy young man" ostensibly absent from Melville's utopian space (always on the verge of transforming into a sunny hell for the narrator). No young man could be more melancholic than Tommo, trapped on the island by his throbbing leg and conflictual desires, longing for his long-departed friend Toby, with whom he escaped the tyrannical life aboard the *Dolly*. The novel proper ends with this paragraph in which Tommo wonders what happened to his friend: "The mystery which hung over the fate of my friend and companion Toby has never been cleared up. I still remain ignorant whether he succeeded in leaving the valley, or perished at the hands of the islanders."<sup>11</sup> A few months after *Typee*'s publication, Richard Tobias Greene, the "Toby" of *Typee*, reappeared, as if Melville had been calling out to Greene at the end of his fiction. Melville transformed "Toby's Own Story" (Greene's narrative, published in the 11 July 1846 *Evangelist*) into the sequel that then became part of his novel, "The Story of Toby."<sup>12</sup>

That Toby reappears after such a long absence in the final paragraph of *Typee* suggests that he has been a haunting presence for Tommo all along. Toby's final appearance disavows the disavowal of both male melancholy and the melancholy young man, one item on the list of "absent" American monstrosities. While *Typee* demands its own treatment, its relevance for *Pym* here lies in its simultaneous pathologizing of male melancholia and foregrounding of its experiential reality. Tommo disavows his own melancholia but mourns his own fate, to an extent that rivals Odysseus's mourning on Calypso's island, throughout the novel—forever oscillating between sensual abandon and an anxiety verging on abject terror of the Typee. The fact that mourning in *Typee* relates to an absent male friend, whose literal absence must become a textual absence as well, links it to *Pym*, a novel about male loss and the inability to perform the work of mourning. Unable to articulate that the object of his mourning is another man, Pym lapses into melancholia, a state that is never acknowledged as such but is, as I will argue, reflected textually. As I will further argue, this melancholia has deep metaphorical value both for Poe's own culture and for our own, especially in terms of same-sex relations, the representation of which is key to the novel. I read *Pym* as an allegory of lost male bonds in

patriarchy and an attempt to escape patriarchy, in its abstracted form as the Father. The condition of manhood as diagnosed in the novel is essentially melancholic, inviting an exploration of the ways in which Poe represents male melancholia and its implications for queer and gender literary studies. In applying a revised, queer version of Freudian melancholia theory to Poe, this essay both extends the study of Poe's representation of male sexuality, a much-needed effort, and joins the growing body of new queer critical revaluations of melancholia.



### Intimate Communion and Fraternal Tears

The language Poe employs to describe the intensity of Pym's relationship with his friend Augustus Barnard recalls John Donne in its fusion of erotic and spiritual registers: "Augustus thoroughly entered into my state of mind. It is probable, indeed, that our intimate communion had resulted in a partial interchange of character" (*Writings*, 1:65). There is a cunning sleight of hand here: the language of (qualified) indeterminacy used to describe the extent of male-male intimacy—a "partial interchange of character" has probably (from the phrasing here, has most likely) occurred—obscures or softens or shrouds the revelation of an intimacy that the two men *have* achieved, their "intimate communion," from which any character interchanges between them would flow. It behooves us to linger on such moments precisely because the haze of indeterminacy so often makes it difficult for critics to settle on a reading of representations of same-sex relationships as homoerotic. The language of intimacy here, in terms of what has been achieved between the men, is both indeterminate (probable interchange) and decidedly determinate (intimate communion), and where it is indeterminate, not terribly so, since the strong implication is that not only an intimate communion but also a certain degree of identity blurring has occurred.

In Poe's era, the phrase "intimate communion" most often refers to the relationship between God and man or man and Nature rather than the Last Supper, the ritual in which Jesus shares the bread and wine that symbolize his own flesh and blood. Wordsworth's phrasing in *The Prelude* is characteristic:

Youth maintains,  
 In all conditions of society,  
 Communion more direct and intimate  
 With Nature,—hence, oftentimes, with reason too—  
 Than age or manhood, even.<sup>13</sup>

Significantly, Poe employs this language of divinity and spiritual connection to describe relations between men rather than to make an abstracted, philosophical point: Augustus not only infuses Pym's mind but "thoroughly enter[s] into" it; their communion is so intense that it collapses their very identities, which have "interchanged." The idea of soul-unity finds its greatest antebellum American elaboration in Emerson. In his famous essay "The Over-Soul," published three years after *Pym*, he writes of "an influx of the Divine mind into our mind."<sup>14</sup> Here, Emerson describes Revelation, our encounter with the indwelling presence of God, the soul that always knows, linked to all other souls that form the conglomerate Over-Soul.<sup>15</sup> The chief difference between Emerson's and Poe's use of similar imagery is that, whereas Emerson propounds a view of divinity *within* man, Poe uses sacral language to emphasize the human and corporeal, rather than divine and spiritual, connections *between* men.

Poe's description draws out the homoerotic themes in Plato, who in *The Symposium* describes souls seeking their split halves, which can be of the same sex as well as the opposite sex, and in Christianity, which centers on the body of a beautiful young man whose flesh and blood we symbolically imbibe. But if Pym and Augustus's intensifying relationship finds expression in the Platonic rhetoric of soul mingling, an anticipation of its later, consuming despair simultaneously infuses descriptions of their early ardor. It is precisely Augustus's morbidity that incites Pym's growing interest in sea life: "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. For the bright side of the painting I had a limited sympathy." Pym's embrace of Augustus's pleasurable pain quickly reaches a feverish apotheosis:

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. Such visions or desires—for they amounted to desires—are common, I have since been assured, to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men—at the time of which I speak I regarded them only as prophetic glimpses of a destiny which I felt myself in a measure bound to fulfil. (*Writings*, 1:65)

Why should it be that the dark rather than "the bright side of the painting" captivates Pym? In this crucial passage, Poe's protagonist broadens what could be a secret confession of his maddening fears and fantasies of isolation and despair into a kind of manifesto for a distinct and "numerous race of the melancholy among men." The preposition "among" makes the most

telling point: it is not merely a “whole” new race but a race that exists among—or within—the larger race of manhood itself. If, as I have been suggesting, the queer potentiality of antebellum texts lies in depictions of masculine failure, Poe’s location of a peculiar phenomenon in male gendered identity, a *race* of melancholy men who live among other men, a non-normative class of men cut off from the larger body, emerges as one of the most significant of such sites. To draw on the work of postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, we can posit that, in Poe’s depiction of a race of melancholy men *among* other men, he locates a particular subaltern gendered class within normative manhood, a *gendered dispossessed*, a class of men cut off from prevailing codes, behaviors, privileges, and experiences. If we see Poe’s melancholy subaltern race as the gendered dispossessed, we must insert this view into a general understanding of American manhood and womanhood as themselves intensely contested and embattled sites of national identity politics, categories hardening yet in flux, a welter of myriad vexations over race, class, and sexuality as well as gender.<sup>16</sup>

That this class is a “race” demands at least some consideration of racial identity in this model of gendered and sexual identity. The entire question of race in *Pym* is a deeply vexed one whose full engagement far exceeds the limited scope of this essay; my focus here will be on the intersection of race and the kinds of gendered and sexual anxieties that, I argue, are important sites for inquiries into the representation of same-sex desire in Poe’s novel. The character of the multiracial strongman Dirk Peters—obsessively and suggestively referred to as “the hybrid”—is crucial to these intersections, which reach an apotheosis in the latter portion of the novel, set on the island of Tsalal, populated by natives whose dark coloration even extends to their teeth. (I return to the Tsalal section below.) Dirk Peters is not only a hybrid in terms of race, but a hybrid form in his embodiments of racial and sexual anxiety *and*, as I will argue, homoerotic desire; as such, he is key to our present consideration of the ways in which grief and melancholia may provide deeply resonant modes of expression for same-sex desire and of the ways in which this desire intersects with race, especially the race of the melancholy *among* men. His importance in this regard emerges in Peters’s relations to the other men and theirs to him. The most poignant line in reference to the hybrid gendered and sexual status of Peters—and not less his racial status, the possible significance of which will unfold below—reveals his position within the gendered dispossession of the monstrous mutineers. Commenting on the swarming rumors over Peters, his “prodigious strength” and questionable sanity, Pym concludes that “he was regarded at the time of the mutiny with feelings more of derision than of anything else” (*Writings*, 1:87). The poignancy of this line lies in its subtle anticipation of the surprisingly deep bond that will form between Pym, Augustus, and

Peters. Given the shocking, alienating early descriptions of Peters as a kind of sideshow freak of incommensurate physical traits that externalize his unseemly racial intermixture, and given his initial complicity with the violent mutineers, Peters's emergence as a positively valued character who forms such a strong bond with the novel's heroes is a remarkable development. The depiction of Peters as abject, a social status that he shares with the other endangered men, prepares us for the formation of their relationship. Despite his massive strength and shock value, Peters occupies a subaltern position within this overturned world. If Peters represents the sexual subaltern, he is both part of and alienated from the mutineers' savage fraternity, which views him as an object of ridicule.

Pym's peculiar despair may be that "particularly notable, and particularly melancholic," kind found in the first-person bachelor-narrated novel. Possibly Pym and Augustus's friendship provides an "alternative to more conventional marital and familial domesticity, and also signifies the depressing 'lack' of such alternatives," anticipating the "modernist melancholia" that is a "self-defining sense of pervasive loss coupled with a refusal to recognize that loss."<sup>17</sup> In addition to melancholia, fears of destruction, famine, exile, and death inform these cut-off, abnegated male subject positions. Pym and Augustus share an eroticized version of these melancholic visions or desires ("desire" is repeated, emphasized).

In a crucial but rarely examined episode that sets up Poe's venture into non-normative manhood, Pym outwits his maternal grandfather in his final opportunity to thwart Pym's plan to join his friend Augustus on a whaling voyage. Disguised "in a thick seaman's cloak," Pym attempts to sneak aboard the *Grampus* during a fog, Augustus leading the way. The grandfather looks Pym "full in the face," yet Pym proceeds to trick him, impersonating a young ruffian and thereby escaping the old man, who nevertheless lunges "full tilt" at Pym with his upraised umbrella (*Writings*, 1:67). Pym's grandfather signs normative masculinity in this novel: wealth, power, station, industry, customs, lineage, primogeniture, and tradition, all of which in turn both pivot upon and lock down class stability, racial stability, and heterosexual presumption. If Pym rejects normative manhood in rejecting his grandfather, his voyage aboard the *Grampus* allegorizes his attempt to explore his position within and ties to the abjectified community of which he is a part. It also allows him to spend time with Augustus ostensibly freed from the burden of his "real" identity—even if Augustus, whose father is the *Grampus*'s Captain, is not.

The *Grampus* mutiny, the escape from it, and the grievous aftermath of survival before the *Jane Guy* rescues Pym and Peters, the last two survivors, all create a whirling tumult. Patrick Horrigan has theorized, from a queer



perspective, the strangely liberating effects of such disaster on narrative, the new social interactions made possible by the often literal overturning of narrative order. The descent into chaos triggered by the *Grampus* mutiny, like the overturning of the ship in the 1972 film *The Poseidon Adventure*, allows the reader and the characters to explore non-normative possibilities—in Horrigan’s words, “an unusually wide range of identifications.”<sup>18</sup> In so doing, it facilitates a series of confrontations—principally, that between patriarchal normativity (nautical law) and subaltern male identity (the mutineers). Horrigan’s language evokes Bakhtin’s theory of the carnivalesque, to which I will make reference below in terms of Dirk Peters’s physicality and the visual attention it incites, a spectacle that deepens the potential social radicalism of the mutiny. The *Grampus*’s male community quickly whittles down to Pym, Augustus (who will soon die), the hybrid strongman Dirk Peters, and Parker, the man who first suggests the recourse to anthropophagy and whom the others eventually eat. This diminished group endlessly mourns over its predicament, as the numerous mentions of weeping attest. While there is a great deal of literal textual reason for the characters to bemoan their lot—starving, expiring from thirst, watching Augustus die horribly—I argue that their excessive, sustained outpouring of feeling also functions on a metaphorical level—as what Freud will later describe as fraternal guilt over killing the Father. Fraternity may reject patriarchy (first in the form of Pym’s ridiculed, despairing grandfather, stumbling about in disoriented consternation, now in the form of the easily dispensed with, and presumably dispatched, Captain Barnard), but that does not mean it doesn’t suffer the effects of loss.

While highly dubious as anthropology, Freud’s findings in *Totem and Taboo* are suggestive for *Pym* and queer and gender studies. (For this approach to Freud, I follow the leads of Jonathan Dollimore’s *Sexual Dissidence* and Leo Bersani’s *Freudian Body*.)<sup>19</sup> Freud theorizes that the roots of human civilization lie within an ancient struggle between a fraternal order and an original Father. This fraternal order competes against the Father, whom its members kill and then cannibalistically ingest, both to gain access to Woman/the Mother and to free themselves from the patriarch’s rule. In Freud’s hands, their attendant grief and guilt over this deed reads, when pointedly taken at face value, like another version of Poe’s race of melancholy men. Filled with “contradictory feelings,” so Freud’s narrative goes, the “tumultuous mob of brothers” “hated their father, who presented such a formidable obstacle to their craving for power and their sexual desires; but they loved and admired him too. After they had got rid of him, had satisfied their hatred and had put into effect their wish to identify themselves with him, the affection which had all this time been

pushed under was bound to make itself felt. It did so in the form of remorse. A sense of guilt . . .”<sup>20</sup>

Freud then argues that the taboo against incest allows the fraternal group to rescue “the organization which had made them strong—and which may have been based on *homosexual feelings and acts*.”<sup>21</sup> Unpacking Freud’s 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia,”<sup>22</sup> and thereby making way for the extraordinary range of present queer theory projects that grapple with melancholia and its intertwined relationships with sexuality, gender, class, and race, Judith Butler writes of the “melancholia of gender identification”; she draws out the implicit Freudian point that “it would appear that the taboo against homosexuality must *precede* the heterosexual incest taboo; the taboo against homosexuality in effect creates the heterosexual ‘dispositions’ by which the Oedipal conflict becomes possible.”<sup>23</sup> Because homosexuality must be, along with incestuous relations, repudiated, the fraternal is always already haunted and left bereft by its internalized awareness of the prohibition against the homosexual desires that mobilized it in the first place.

Pym has to prevent himself from “screaming with laughter” as he tricks and humiliates the grandfather who is “more attached” to him than “any other person in the world” (*Writings*, 1:67, 57). If we see Pym’s rejection of his grandfather—the emotional experience of which Pym never directly comments on, but which is implicitly as emotionally devastating for him as for his grandfather despite the outward show of lunatic merriment<sup>24</sup>—and his league with Augustus as the fraternal revolt against patriarchy, a revolt then taken to hellish extremes with the bloody *Grampus* mutiny (a battle against the Father for, despite its masculine-sounding moniker, the female body of a ship), perhaps we can understand the prolonged and excessive group male mourning in *Pym* as an expression of the murderous fraternal order’s remorse and guilt as Freud theorized it.

Poe emphasizes the shared mourning—though not necessarily empathy—among his gendered/sexual subalterns. From the time they are adrift to the moment they are rescued, Pym’s group keeps dissolving into tears: “neither Augustus nor myself could refrain from bursting into tears,” Pym reports (*Writings*, 1:122); Parker “weep[s] like a child,” though this “weakness” is “not of long duration” (1:123); upon learning that the other men have drunk the last of the wine, “Augustus burst[s] into tears” (1:128); again, Parker bursts “into a flood of tears, weeping like a child, with loud cries and sobs,” this time “for two or three hours” (1:130); now, both Augustus and Parker dead, Pym and Peters “despair, weeping aloud like children, and neither of [them] attempting to offer consolation to the other” (1:144–45). Ostensibly, in this last instance the men are weeping over food, not death, but their physical

deprivation allegorizes their emotional one: lack of food and loss of life are symbolic mirrors. Moreover, given the earlier language of communion, we must consider the grief over the depleted reserves of wine as an image that collapses the imagery of the Lord's Supper with homoerotic desire and grief. In other words, Poe uses Christian iconography subtly to suggest the emotional and physical nature of ties between men. Inconsolable and unconsoling, the remaining representatives of the bereft subaltern group—the group cut off from the larger cut-off group, a deeper level of abjection—emerge with no better skills for empathy and fellow-feeling than the previous, larger fraternal group of the mutineers evinced. Lest we think all of this excessive emotion—they cry as continuously as Odysseus and his men—pours out routinely, Pym counters defensively, “it must be remembered that our intellects were so entirely disordered . . . that we could not justly be considered, at that period, in the light of rational beings” (*Writings*, 1:145). Again and again, Pym reminds us that these events exceed the boundaries of normativity; male emotionalism reaches heights of sublimity.

Obviously, these tears are more than amply justified by textual events. But they also can be viewed as an allegorical trope. What I wish to suggest about the incessant, anguished flow of tears and emotions is that it represents the subaltern group's mournful awareness of the longing that undergirds it and the puniness of its forces. Moreover, these tears—which can be read as Pym's mourning over the loss of his beloved Augustus, Parker's awareness of his disenfranchisement from the powerful trio of Pym, Peters, and Augustus, the group's inexpressible desires finding vent, and so forth—flow back to the initial site of unresolved, buried emotional trauma—Pym's rejection of his grandfather—and toward the irresolvable resolution of the climax.

The men's crying also carries important nineteenth-century valences about manhood and sexuality.<sup>25</sup> The references to tears increasingly trope the theme of madness, figured as collapse into a childlike state (“weeping like a child”), and one passage strikingly takes this theme into the level of ambiguity that I have suggested is a romantic mode of expressing queer desire. Augustus and Parker are still alive as Pym ruminates:

I suffered less than any of us . . . retaining my powers of mind . . . while the rest were completely prostrated in intellect, and seemed to be brought to a species of second childhood . . . simpering . . . with idiotic smiles, and uttering the most absurd platitudes. . . . It is possible, however, that my companions may have entertained the same opinion of their own condition as I did of mine, and that I may have unwittingly been guilty of the same extravagances and imbecilities as

themselves—this is a matter which cannot be determined. (*Writings*, 1:130)

Poe's description of the men's debility here bears striking resemblances to those of such notable and influential health reformers as Sylvester Graham. Pym's emergence was coterminous with that of health and sexual reform literature by Graham, his disciple Mary Gove Nichols, and John Todd, who railed against the looming potentialities for young men's corruption—most notably figured as onanism, which could easily lead to the “unnatural congress” of homosexuality.<sup>26</sup> Because onanism and homosexuality were so inextricably linked in the reformers' minds, any discussion of the former was inevitably one of the latter. A consideration of the corresponding valences in Poe's and Graham's language yields some provocative insights into nineteenth-century understandings of same-sex desire and what may have been registers for the discussion of it.

In a well-known essay, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick inserts Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* into the context of nineteenth-century medical discourse on onanism, suggesting that one possible signifier for autoerotic practice might be the “unstanchable emission, convulsive and intransitive,” of Marianne's tears in a nighttime scene between sisters in a bedroom.<sup>27</sup> If we can read tears as the flow of autoerotic and same-sex sexual desire and practice, the tears in Pym can signify both onanistic and homoerotic impulses. They are homoerotic in that they pour out from men in the group at the same time, but they are onanistic in that the outpouring of tears—the grief they sign—can be witnessed but not empathetically shared by the other members of the group. Pym alerts us that he doesn't feel a party to the men's debilitated state; we recall that Pym and Peters “despair, weeping aloud like children, and neither of [them] attempting to offer consolation to the other.” Both homoerotically positioned and sexually inviolate, the men weep together yet always weep alone.

That this collective/singular weeping leads to states of “imbecility” closely corresponds to antebellum reformers' findings on the dangers of onanism. As Graham put it, “the wretched transgressor . . . becomes . . . [an] idiot, whose deeply sunken and vacant, glossy eye, and livid, shrivelled countenance, and ulcerous, toothless gums, and foetid [sic] breath, and feeble, broken voice, and emaciated and dwarfish and crooked body, and almost hairless head . . . denote a premature old age! a blighted body—and a ruined soul!”<sup>28</sup> The term “spermatic economy” has been used to describe the sexual nature of the program of self-control that organized the construction of nineteenth-century manhoods. If, like ejaculate, tears must be conserved to preserve male power and maintain the crucial façade of emotional detachment, manhood's

most familiar mask, the excessive outpouring of tears in *Pym* threatens to deplete the reserves of masculinist authority.<sup>29</sup> If weeping can be read as an economy—a “*lachrymose* economy”—of onanistic and homoerotic exchange, it does not signify in Poe’s treatment a view of onanism as, in Sedgwick’s words, “a reservoir of potentially utopian metaphors and energies for independence, self-possession, and a rapture that may owe relatively little to political or interpersonal abjection”<sup>30</sup>—quite the reverse. Graham wrote, in *Lecture to Young Men on Chastity* (published only a year before *Pym*), that the shame of masturbation prevents men from “forming those honorable relations in life, so desirable to every virtuous heart; and frequently dooms them, either to a gloomy celibacy or an early grave.” A masturbator’s skin “assumes a sickly, pale . . . cadaverous aspect.” The “withering influence” of this practice imbues the perpetrator/victim with a “peculiar sensibility” and “a general sense of languor, and debility.”<sup>31</sup> Graham’s work and Poe’s unite in an understanding of young white American manhood as prone to “excessive debility” (*Pym*’s words; see *Writings*, 1:133), melancholy “gloom,” sexual “peculiarity,” and an attraction to death.

What makes *Pym* especially affecting as a nineteenth-century treatment of these themes is its representation of male grief as freakishly unclassifiable—an energy, or phenomenon, that bursts out at odd intervals but can be neither processed nor resolved. Far from bringing comfort to the grief-stricken, mourning only further deepens the levels of disconnection and self-alienation that characterize male identity in Poe’s novel. Writing about American manhood, Sally Robinson conjectures:

The idea that men are emotionally blocked owes its sense and its dominance to a particular construction of male heterosexuality and the male body: male sexual energies are constantly flowing, sexual arousal “automatic” and uncontrollable, and any blockage of these energies and the substance through which those energies are expressed, leads either to psychological and physical damage or to violent explosions. . . . Importantly, the emotions most often identified as dangerously blocked are anger and resentment, rather than, say, love and fear.<sup>32</sup>

*Pym* shows us male blockage from a somewhat different perspective; if its men are “blocked,” unable to express their desires for each other, the “release” of tears provides none at all. Release in this novel signifies deepening levels of entrapment and isolation, not cathartic liberation.



### Poe, Freud, and Mourning

Freud theorizes what he innovatively calls “the work of mourning”—the normal process of grief for a loss, usually of a person but sometimes of things or abstract ideals, like liberty—as an extremely efficient process that Philip Fisher describes as “curiously mechanical.” As Fisher puts it, “In the work of mourning, Freud claimed, every single memory or detail of the lost love object is brought up, bit by bit, hypercathected, and then discharged.” “There is,” writes Fisher, “a pedantry to grief” in Freud. Despite this “inner pedantry,” Freud’s theory has a particular value for Fisher: “it suggests that we do not simply wait for the passions to fade of their own accord.” Using Achilles’ furious, violent, extended grieving for his murdered friend and, in many traditions, lover Patroclus in Homer’s classical epic *The Iliad* as an example, Fisher writes that Achilles, in Freudian fashion, works out his grief, “fatigues it instead of waiting for it to fade.”<sup>33</sup>

Plotted along a line of literal reasons for grief, *Pym* conforms tonally and structurally to the schema of mourning Freud presents. The mutiny and its aftermath, which principally involves the death of Augustus, can be read as the process of hypercathection, a zenith of emotional intensity that then abates, fatigues itself into pedantic blankness. This pedantic blankness finds textual expression in the pseudonaturalist observations of fauna, the numbing nautical details, and the procession of empirical data that dominate the novel’s second half. Indeed, the signal shift in the tonal register of the second half is its seeming emotional blankness. Augustus’s death is passed over with no mention of Pym’s, or Peter’s, reaction to it beyond the initial one. Like Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* (1958), the novel begins all over again in its second half and repeats the first half’s events as if to restage and thereby correct them, but it does so in a benumbed fashion that suggests awareness of ineluctable failure.<sup>34</sup> Many of the first half’s key tropes reoccur in the second: catastrophic betrayal (the mutiny/the Tsalalian duplicity); living inhumation (Pym in the hold/the party ambushed within the fissure by the Tsalalians); loss and loneliness (death of Augustus and Parker leaving Pym and Dirk Peters alone/death of Wilson Allen leaving Pym and Dirk Peters “the only living white men upon the island” [*Writings*, 1:188]); and so forth. The chief elements in the pattern are enclosure, betrayal, and aloneness. Pym’s pronouncements upon these similar incidents repeat the extreme timbre of the first half, creating the same sense of sublimity, of “lamentable” events beyond the limits of human comprehension. But in the Tsalal section, the lamentations are dry. The second half of the novel stanches the gushing flow of tears that drenched the first half.

While the novel is readable as a narrativization of the Freudian theory of mourning, it is also and perhaps more importantly an example of the other, and more bewildering, psychic experience Freud describes in his essay: melancholia. What distinguishes grief from melancholia, Freud argues, is that, whereas in grief the loss of the love-object is consciously felt, in melancholia this loss is an unconscious one. “[The] melancholiac displays something else which is lacking in grief—an extraordinary fall in his self-esteem. In grief the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself.” The keener awareness felt by the melancholiac may bring him or her closer to “self-knowledge” than normally possible; “we only wonder why a man must become ill before he can discover truth of this kind.” These “self-reproaches,” however, can also be interpreted as “reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted upon the subject’s own ego.”<sup>35</sup> Key to my reading of *Pym*, Freud theorizes that “an attitude of revolt,” masked by “melancholic contrition,” instigates melancholia. With his customary confidence, he says that once we understand this attitude of revolt as foundational, “there is no difficulty in reconstructing the process” that results in melancholia.

First, there existed an object-choice, the libido had attached itself to a certain person; then, owing to a real injury or disappointment concerned with the loved person, the object-relation was undermined. The result was not the normal one of withdrawal of the libido from this object and transference of it to a new one, but something different. . . . [The object-cathexis was abandoned]; but the free libido was withdrawn into the ego and not directed to another object, [which established] an identification of the ego with the abandoned object. . . . The narcissistic identification with the object then becomes a substitute for the erotic cathexis, the result of which is that in spite of the conflict with the loved person the love-relation need not be given up, [effecting a] substitution of identification for object-love.

What results in this substitution is, “of course,” says Freud, a return to “primal narcissism,” which entails the ego’s wish to absorb its object and the attendant ambivalence of this process. The ego, as it did in the first stage of psychosexual development, the “oral or cannibalistic” stage, wants to incorporate the object into itself, “by devouring it.”<sup>36</sup>

*Pym* is apposite to Freud’s schema here. Poe’s protagonist evinces the characteristics of the Freudian melancholiac—an attitude of revolt; a tendency to berate oneself as a means of voicing rage at another; a tendency toward narcissism; a desire to ingest the object of one’s desire; and a general ambivalent disposition toward the entire project of desire. If we look at the novel as a

critique of American manhood that, if not a determined depiction of same-sex love, is at the very least an eroticized treatment of relations between men, the melancholia Pym shares with the other men emerges as both a lament for the current state of masculine identity and an elegiac cry of loss over male-male bonds, which cannot be coherently sustained in the novel (or Poe's culture). If the novel begins with the rapturous allure of a male-male romance, an allure both endangered and heightened by physical peril, the threat of exposure, and morbidity, it proceeds to stall, defer, thwart, and finally eradicate this romance altogether. In every way, the intimate communion between Pym and Augustus is "something different." Pym's loss of Augustus is a "real injury or disappointment concerned with the loved person," the full gravity of which cannot be expressed, must be swallowed up by the ocean of novelistic and societal propriety. All of the libidinal energy Augustus has awakened in Pym turns inward and transforms into the self-sustaining, self-depleting substance of melancholia.

The novel foregrounds melancholy as the sign for a welter of themes that together produce it, each of these themes enacting and building toward a general statement about American manhood. In Freudian terms, the "intimate communion" between Pym and Augustus that results, in part, in "an interchange" of their personalities returns male-male object-choice, which cannot be consciously avowed, to primary narcissism; Pym's recriminations over his hypocrisy reflect the melancholiac's loss of self-esteem; the mutiny figures in hellish terms melancholia's propensity toward revolt; and the cannibalism episode deepens the hellishness by suggesting that the desire to incorporate the Other has been realized in grotesquely literal terms.



### Cannibalistic Sexuality

**F**reud argues that the melancholiac's ego, as it did in the first stage of psychosexual development, the "oral or cannibalistic" stage, wants to incorporate the object into itself "by devouring it." Freud illuminates Pym's theme of cannibalism: Augustus entered Pym's mind thoroughly, to the extent that his character and Augustus's interchanged; the scene of cannibalism grotesquely satirizes this spiritual exchange by rendering it a monstrously corporealized one. If we recall Poe's Emersonian language of soul-unity in his description of the "interchange" between Pym and Augustus, and consider that Poe has long been known as one of transcendentalism's chief critics, we can



posit that his critique of Emerson here is to put the encounter with the flesh—in its throbbing and then horrifying corporeality—back into the merging of souls. Whether or not it should be read in sexual terms, the Pym-Augustus relationship constitutes a narrative of same-sex love's inevitably grim fate in the social order, communion ceding to cannibalism, Eros to Thanatos, love to horror.

But the scene of cannibalism does more than this. It gives vent to a gathering, unbearable tension over the increasingly corporealized male body in the novel, and it represents an encounter with the denied but now inescapable reality of sexual difference, a reality that takes a vengeful and most horrifying form. To place the cannibalism episode in its proper context, we must consider the function of Dirk Peters, a character who constitutes the somatic discourse of the novel, manhood made flesh. We first learn of him within the context of "the most horrible butchery" of the mutiny, led by the bloodthirsty black cook, onboard the *Grampus* (*Writings*, 1:86).

The "hybrid" Peters, as he is often called, is the son of "an Indian squaw" and a "fur-trader" and bears resemblance to "negroes." Pym appraises him as "one of the most purely ferocious-looking men [he] ever beheld," short of stature, large of limb, with a deformed, immense, bald cranium (*Writings*, 1:87). A living legend among Nantucket seafarers, Dirk Peters embodies doubleness of race, physicality, personality, and sexuality, as his double-phallic name suggests. The very emphasis on the crazy contours of his flesh makes him a somatic spectacle.<sup>37</sup> If Berenice's teeth represent female sexuality and the fear of castration, Peters's protuberant teeth represent both a fearsome phallic sexuality and an insatiable desire to rend apart flesh—a carnal appetite.<sup>38</sup>

Poe's insistent focus on Dirk Peters's physicality forces us into an intimacy with the male body that is unusual for American romanticism. Peters's asymmetrical features—enormous hands and head, small frame—compel us to consider his body as such, to *visualize* him. Poe insists that we experience Peters as a body, as a tactile site of maleness. Unlike Melville's male island beauty Marnoo in *Typee*, Poe's character certainly cannot be called a "Polynesian Apollo"; unlike Hawthorne's dubious, closed-off, but attractive young men, Peters is neither handsome nor wistfully appealing. The anarchic contours of his flesh are rather repulsive, and yet, like Augustus's rotting arm, they are also audaciously prominent. Much like Melville's Queequeg, Peters is a sign of simultaneously repulsive and eroticized physicality, as well as the intertwining of Otherness and queer threat. Peters provides the male body of homoerotic potentiality, the flesh for Pym and Augustus's intimate communion. Augustus's

rotting arm and, later, the rotting leg that falls off when the men throw his dead body into the sea, symbolize the alternately aching and diseased phallus of homoerotic desire. (Compare Tommo's throbbing leg in *Typee*, which serves as a doppelganger-limb, a substitute that is comically pounded by a Typee medicine man as Tommo yowls in pain.) Dirk Peters may even be seen as representing the biological organ of male sexuality, the penis, as well as its abstracted form, the phallus.

Peters, like the mutiny he helps to implement, provokes new ways of relation. He embodies Bakhtin's theory of the "carnavalesque," especially in terms of the "ambivalent nature" of carnival images. This quality of Dirk Peters relates to the most significant point Bakhtin makes in this regard for our purposes: "Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of interrelationships between individuals."<sup>39</sup> Peters, the shocking alien transformed into the conductor of homoaffectional ties, the Other who facilitates recognition of sameness, manifests the radical aspect of the novel. Yet if the ambivalence he initially provokes diminishes, this ambivalence is only one component of a larger attitude of ambivalence toward male-male relationships in the novel, one that *never* diminishes, and one that finds a particularly grotesque expression in the episode of the hermaphrodite brig.

The appearance of the hermaphrodite brig (in chapter 10)—the most spectacular horror scene in American romance, in which male and female corpses, before being detected as such, appear to wave to the dying men as a beacon of salvation—is deeply ambivalent in symbolic effect.<sup>40</sup> Though technically a hermaphrodite brig is a "sailing vessel that combines the characters of two kinds of craft; now especially one that is square-rigged like a brig forward, and schooner-rigged aft" (*OED*), Poe makes the point that both male and female corpses bestrew the ship, inscribing the biological sense of hermaphroditism (*Writings*, 1:101).<sup>41</sup> By presenting heterosexual relations and sexual difference in so brutal and nauseating a manner, the novel treats the intermingling of sexes—and the reality of women's bodies—with revulsion. Yet the scene can also be read as a satire of the pitiful mini-fraternity helplessly dwarfed by the horrifyingly-hilariously mock-salvational ship. Normativity, abandoned, ineluctably returns, in the guise of nightmare.

The hermaphrodite brig mobilizes the now-familiar fearful connections between cannibalism and homoerotic desire, the former metaphorizing the latter. A huge seagull gives uncanny animation, by feasting on it, to the corpse of the "tall stout figure leaning on the bulwark" who appears to be waving benevolently at Pym and the men. The gull drops a hideous morsel of "liver-like substance" on the deck, and Pym exclaims, "may God forgive me, but now,

for the first time, there flashed through my mind a thought, a thought which I will not mention, and I felt myself making a step towards the ensanguined spot" (*Writings*, 1:124–25). Pym ultimately does not consume the morsel. But Poe gets considerable mileage out of Pym's momentary flash of carnal, debased desire for another man's flesh. It can hardly be insignificant that the person with whom Pym locks eyes at this point is Augustus, who meets Pym's upward-directed gaze "with a degree of intense and eager meaning." Yet it is precisely Augustus's eyes and the meaning in them that brings Pym to his "senses": "I sprang forward quickly, and, with a deep shudder, threw the frightful thing into the sea" (*Writings*, 1:125). It takes a perfervid scene of flesh-eating between these men to reveal the source of prohibitions on their relationship: it has been wild, reckless, spirited Augustus who set the limits of their ardor. Perhaps his wildness, his restlessness, has constituted an ingenious plan to elude Pym's advances. After all, Augustus always tries to get away, finally succeeding in the ultimate escape plan, his own death. In this exchange of looks between the men, we have same-sex love as, in the language of Melville's last work, the 1891 novella *Billy Budd*, "both fate and ban."<sup>42</sup>

If the hermaphrodite brig luridly allegorizes subaltern sexuality's relationship to the normative sexual order, what it offers these cut-off men is a homoerotic meal that cannot be consumed—the allure of a desire that cannot be "mentioned" or realized. This scene, though, also shares with the literature of sexual reform a fundamentally ambivalent relation to heterosociality. As with so many touches in Poe's novel, it appears hardly insignificant that the most explosive scene of horror centers on a spectacle that involves the bodies of *both men and women*. That female as well as male corpses are scattered across the hermaphrodite brig not only adds to the sense of horror but may actually *produce* it: the novel represents male-female intimacy as grotesquerie, a kind of frozen pageant of mayhem and disgust.<sup>43</sup> This grotesquerie renders heterosexuality in the novel an uncanny return of the repressed. If a fantasy of male-male bonds unhindered by compulsory heterosexuality is one of the driving forces for fraternity generally, as Leslie Fiedler influentially argued in *Love and Death in the American Novel*, Pym forces fraternity to confront disavowed heterosexuality in the form of horrific squalor that has a punitive charge.<sup>44</sup> The hermaphrodite brig's appearance is a strongly reproving spectacle, a staunch corrective to the attempted creation of a fraternal order without women.

The episode is also, as we have noted, a rendering of utopian spiritual-erotic connections between men into ghastly corporeality—a revulsion, a rending apart of the flesh of other men—and it signs a genuine and traumatic loss. Though the fraternal group has had a fleeting access to a world of shared male pleasure, this world must be renounced. As Pym's description demonstrates,

the possibilities afforded them by the disordering of their lives include an intimacy and a comfort with each other that some of the loudest mouthpieces of their culture rail against: “We sat close together, supporting each other with the aid of the broken ropes about the windlass, and devising methods of escape from our frightful situation. We derived much comfort from taking off our clothes and wringing the water from them. . . . We helped Augustus off with his, and wrung them for him, when he experienced the same comfort” (*Writings*, 1:120). This utopian vision of communal, mutually comforting male bonds shimmers like an oasis in a sea of despair. The attempt to create a freely homoerotic, homosocial space of cooperation and care—later evoked in *Moby-Dick*’s sperm-squeezing passage and Whitman’s poetry—transmutes into squalid spectacle, into visions desirous of death. Even in the description of Augustus’s corpse we can see that intimate communion transforms healthy bodies into bodies “loathsome beyond expression” (*Writings*, 1:142). If Dirk Peters provides the throbbingly tactile body of male sexuality, the cannibalism episode renders any connection or access to this body unimaginable, even as it stages the heterosocial as both a ruined version of itself and a mockery of fraternal ties.



### An Ego Conniving Its Own Destruction: Hypocrisy and Suicide

**T**hat Pym is unable to mourn the loss of Augustus, that he is unable, like Achilles, to fatigue his grief properly, unable even to *name* Augustus as his loved object in this book as obsessed with naming (the obsessive cataloging of flora and fauna on Tsalal) as it is with unnamings (Pym’s disavowal of his own name)—all this results in what Freud describes as melancholia. In Poe, as I have noted, melancholia partially manifests as a posttraumatic emotional blankness, a procession of empirical details devoid of feeling—in this regard, Poe understands melancholia differently than Freud, who associates it with a tendency toward “mania.” I would argue, however, that Pym exhibits one of the most characteristic aspects of the Freudian melancholiac, *a tendency to self-loathing*.

Interestingly, one of the ways in which Pym’s self-loathing expresses itself is in recriminations against his own hypocrisy; having made a meal of base duplicity, Poe’s protagonist comes perilously close to forfeiting his own humanity. Early in the narrative, Pym obsesses feverishly over his desires for travel with Augustus, desires he must keep hidden from his family under the veneer of scholarly dedication. In a rare confessional moment, reflecting

ruefully on his past from the temporal remove of first-person narration, Pym admits:

I have since frequently examined my conduct on this occasion with sentiments of displeasure as well as of surprise. The intense hypocrisy I made use of for the furtherance of my project—a hypocrisy pervading every word and action of my life for so long a period of time—could only have been rendered tolerable to myself by the wild and burning expectation with which I looked forward to the fulfillment of my long-cherished visions of travel.

“In pursuance of my scheme of deception,” Pym tells us, “I was necessarily obliged to leave much to the management of Augustus” (*Writings*, 1:66). Pym’s “intense” hypocrisy, pervading “every word and action of his life,” makes him a secret criminal plotting a crime against the Family—a condition of lived duplicity that would be unbearable were it not for the “burning expectation” of his fantasies. And this hypocrisy, remarked upon in the language of self-reproachfulness, has implications beyond the issue of melancholia.

Certainly, anyone who has at one point of their lives lived in the closet—not just the sexual but the race, class, even gendered closet—can relate to Pym’s experience of living a lie, appearing “normal” while indulging in “long-cherished visions” of escape from duplicity. Perhaps Pym’s unnamings of himself in the incident with his grandfather can be seen as an attempt to break away from an old identity founded on lies; namelessness both frees him from compulsory inclusion in heterosexualized and patriarchal manhood and identifies him as that which cannot be named, a blurry nonsubjectivity.<sup>45</sup> Pym’s namelessness both unmoors him from patriarchy—of which a surname is a code—and gives him an opportunity to reinvent himself. Yet, excruciatingly, this break with dishonesty is also the height of Pym’s mendacity. Pym will never stop lying.

As Gustavus Stadler notes, “No other nineteenth-century author [than Poe] so powerfully dramatizes the intimacy of eroticism to the act of truth-telling, and the most fruitful queer work on Poe will read these dramatics with an enriched sense of their historical and institutional settings.”<sup>46</sup> But Pym, even as he recalls the thrill of a budding intimacy with Augustus, identifies himself as one of the most pernicious figures of antebellum culture, the hypocrite. As Karen Halttunen demonstrates in *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, antebellum advice manuals for young men “focused on a single evil trait: hypocrisy.” In a moment when confidence men, duplicitous tricksters who ensnared the innocently unsuspecting, were feared to be infiltrating society, middle-class culture attempted to safeguard itself with the

cult of sincerity: "Perfect candor was a matter not simply of the spoken word but of the entire personal manner and appearance. The sincere youth was supposed to have a frank, open countenance and an ingenuous manner. . . . The sincere youth was in reality exactly what he appeared to be." Sincerity was the solution to hypocrisy, but it also made the youth who embodied its ideals more susceptible to the seduction of confidence men: "In warning the American youth not to be seduced by the evil confidence man, antebellum advice manuals were cautioning him above all not to become a confidence man himself."<sup>47</sup>

Augustus, the brash son of a sea captain, resembles the seductive confidence man, entrancing Pym with stories of South Sea adventures. Yet Pym is a liminal figure between guileless youth and knowing trickster; does the raucous, mean-spirited humor he displays as he watches his grandfather flail evince his moral innocence or a sadistic awareness of human vulnerability, which he exploits? If we think of his hypocrisy in sexual terms, it represents Pym's appearing to live as a functioning, fully participating young man of his culture—implicitly devoted to his family and on his way to starting his own—while simultaneously nurturing corrupt, deviant fantasies of running away with his older (by two years), roguish friend.

*Pym* is not, however, a novel about male bonding but, instead, a novel about the erosion of such ties. Pym's hypocrisy may initially link him to Augustus, but it is not enough to sustain the bond between them, as larger forces eradicate it. By presenting Pym and Augustus's relationship as erotically powerful, the novel forces us to recognize the loss of male bonds as searing. The eroticism makes the loss all the keener, even if this loss will remain unarticulated. Hypocrisy emerges here as more than a sign of Pym's deviance from the social order; it alerts us to severely fraught tensions within the masculinized social order itself. "Deception destroyed the social bonds between men," writes Halttunen, "contaminating the sources of sociability." Hence the desperate embrace of the cult of sincerity, a sphere in which men "could meet without suspicion, without fear of betrayal by confidence men."<sup>48</sup> Pym's hypocrisy, then, functions both as a form of heroic intransigence that allows him to elude the strictures of family and culture and as a sign of the woeful, pervasively unhealthy state of American manhood, which cannot sustain "intimate communion" of the kind Pym initially, and rapturously, experiences with Augustus.

The theme of hypocrisy provides another important, though also new, kind of linkage between Poe and antebellum reformers—not those who principally wrote about male sexuality but, surprisingly enough, given Poe's conflictual racial politics, those who wrote in an abolitionist vein. As David S. Reynolds

persuasively proposes, the figure of hypocrisy that reform literature attempted to unmask could be called “the oxymoronic oppressor,” the embodiment of the “moral and social paradoxes” that most agitated the reformers. “In the eyes of many reformers,” writes Reynolds, “America could be best described through contradiction or paradox: it was a republic that permitted slavery; it was a democracy that was witnessing widening class divisions; it was a land of virgin wilderness but also festering cities; it was a nation of Christians who tolerated the most unChristian practices.” The oxymoronic oppressor expressed the “divided natures” of the American people. In antislavery literature, such a figure was the “Christian slaveholder”; other kinds of figures included “the churchgoing capitalist, the reverend rake, the pious seducer.”<sup>49</sup> Clearly, these types have an enduring resonance in our culture.<sup>50</sup>

Pym the hypocrite is a gendered and, possibly, a sexual cipher, a faker of masculine normativity; Poe’s insistence on heightening the erotic register of the fantasies that fuel Pym’s hypocrisy allegorizes hypocrisy as covert desire. The self for Poe, argues John T. Irwin, is “an identity in difference, a unity that is halved and doubled, an always-about-to-be-accomplished evenness constituted by its being originally and essentially at odds with itself, a shifting marker of positions within geometrical as well as grammatical relationships.”<sup>51</sup> If Pym is the self “at odds with itself,” it is his dangerous desire for adventure with Augustus that produces a schismatic separation from himself and his culture, another part of himself. Poe’s novel may be said to turn warring desires in one hypocritical man’s mind into distinct literary characters: Pym is the American male self, Augustus the embodiment of desire, and—as I have been suggesting, if we apply what Judith Halberstam describes as a “perverse presentism” to the text<sup>52</sup>—Dirk Peters, whose engorged body Poe depicts with fearfulness and awe, stands in for male sexual excitement, for tumescence.

If, as Freud argues, the self-reproaches of melancholiacs are always on some level “reproaches against a loved object which have been shifted on to the patient’s own ego,” perhaps we can read Pym’s retrospective recriminations over his “intense hypocrisy” as an expression of rage against Augustus<sup>53</sup>—as an expression of fury at Augustus for not allowing Pym to save him as Augustus, in part, saved Pym, for having awakened in Pym visions of love that could not be fulfilled. The real object of Pym’s rage, however, has not been Augustus at all, but their shared culture, which eradicates any possibility of sustained love between men.

As Freud argues, an “ego can connive at its own destruction.” The suicidal melancholiac’s thoughts of death are “murderous impulses” directed against others: suicide becomes the melancholiac’s option when the ego is “able

to launch against itself the animosity relating to an object.” Freud takes great pains to point out that love comes with attendant feelings of hate, and therefore that loving relationships are highly ambivalent in nature.<sup>54</sup> If Pym truly loves Augustus erotically as well as spiritually, it is scarcely surprising that his feelings would be ambivalent. Pym’s melancholia is as much an expression of his ambivalence toward his friend as it is of his balked, socially imposed inability to mourn him properly, and it may be that the clue and the key to this ambivalence can be found in that moment at which Pym exchanges the look with Augustus that tells him *not* to eat of the flesh. In any event, Pym’s melancholia does find recourse in suicidal feelings and fantasies. Experiencing what is now the third dissolution of a male community of which he has been a part, the Tsalalians’ destruction of Captain Guy’s party, Pym discloses a vertiginous “*longing to fall*; a desire, a yearning, a passion uncontrollable” (*Writings*, 1:198; original emphasis). Pym grows “terribly excited” as he descends into the chasm that he will hail as “my knell of death!” Overcome by an “irrepressible desire” to look down, he experiences, oddly, not only horror but a “relieved oppression,” and in this desire to fall, Pym’s project of melancholia reaches its peak (*Writings*, 1:197, 198).

That the shirtless “dusky, fiendish, and filmy figure” Dirk Peters catches Pym as he falls—a prefiguring of the classic image of Hollywood heterosexual authenticity, albeit with a man catching another man who confesses that he has “swooned” (*Writings*, 1:198)—counterbalances Pym’s suicidal melancholy against fraternal desire, embodied by the fluctuating presence of Peters. Pym—or, more properly, Poe—confers upon Peters the ultimate recognition, the acknowledgment that he is a fellow white man (*Writings*, 1:185). While the logic behind this transformation is unbearably racist, it is also the climax of the process whereby Pym has transferred his affections from one man to another. Augustus was not able to acknowledge or sustain his erotic ties to Pym; Dirk Peters has emerged as the proper object for Pym’s affections. Perhaps this explains why, in the annihilating campaign the novel undertakes, Peters is spared. In the “Note” that comes after the novel’s famously confusing and abrupt ending, we learn that Peters “is still alive, and a resident of Illinois, but cannot be met with at present” (*Writings*, 1:207). Many have read the whitening of Dirk Peters with understandable frustration if not revulsion and as ample evidence of Poe’s racism.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the de-hybridization of Peters deprives him of much of his radical potential. Nevertheless, if his racial transgressiveness has been erased, a powerful, perhaps even compensatory, and possibly subversive complicity with racial Otherness is nevertheless established by the novel, as I argue below.





### The Father's Return/A New Hypocrisy

Pym may provoke more end-directed criticism than any other work, as scholars forever puzzle over the meaning of its famously ambiguous climactic image: "March 22 . . . And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. But there arose in our pathway a shrouded human figure, very far larger in its proportions than any dweller among men. And the hue of the skin of the figure was of the perfect whiteness of the snow" (*Writings*, 1:206). While readings, such as Marie Bonaparte's, of the white figure as the lost mother reappeared are deeply moving and perfectly legitimate, drawing as they do on a long tradition of seeing the sea as maternal<sup>56</sup>—Poe's figure itself looms up from "the milky depths of the ocean" (*Writings*, 1:205)—I interpret this climactic figure differently. There is an equally strong tradition of seeing the sea as paternal, as in classical antiquity (Poseidon/Neptune) and in Emily Dickinson's poem "I started Early—Took my Dog—," which depicts the sea as masculine, heterosexual seducer. And this alternate tropic line is suggestive for Poe's novel.

Pym rejects his grandfather, the emblem of patriarchy, and the novel dispenses handily with such other male authority figures as captains Barnard and Guy. Little wonder that Captain Guy is "exceedingly sensitive to ridicule": Pym's ability to laugh him out of his "apprehensions" echoes his wild impulse to scream with laughter at his grandfather—but only echoes it; Pym's contempt has softened to match the reduced authority of his father-figures (*Writings*, 1:167). Patriarchy's representatives only grow more diminished and ineffectual as the novel develops. But the climax of the novel reaffirms and now reifies its constant message that, while patriarchal figures may be conquered and even dispensed with, patriarchy *itself* is inescapable: male power always already vanquishes subaltern manhood.

According to Freud, "the dead father [becomes] stronger than the living one had been."<sup>57</sup> The fumbling, apoplectic, pitiable grandfather, who only *threatens* to castrate Pym (the business with that ludicrous, heartbreaking umbrella), who in fact reneges on his own castrating campaign, fades along with the ineffectual captains into irrelevance. What supersedes them is the spectacular appearance of the masculine Symbolic. The floating signifier of the phallus, abstracted male power, the sign of patriarchy, of the unconquerable Father, triumphantly emerges. Covered in milky whiteness as suggestive of male sexual fluids as it is of either a privileged racial category or mother's milk, the whiteness that terrifies the Tsalal natives, the white Father figure rises up in appropriately climactic triumph at the end of *Pym*, reinserting and

reestablishing the dominant masculine order to which the novel has tantalizingly but only temporarily offered a moving and heady challenge. Not so much refusing closure as imposing its own, annihilating one, the white figure yanks away, in Lacanian terms, the Symbolic order—language, rationality, the Law of the Father—to which it only provisionally granted the narrator access.

We return to the theme of hypocrisy because this maddeningly, hauntingly enigmatic climax, if it can indeed be interpreted as the Father's return, retroactively reframes the duplicity exhibited by several characters as strategies for the subversion of patriarchy, of escape from possession by and entombment within masculine power. Strangely enough, then, the characters who bear the strongest resemblance to Pym are not the objects of his narcissistic identification, Augustus and Dirk Peters, the latter becoming incorporated into Pym's own racial and gendered identity, but the *Tsalalians*. If Pym outs himself as the problematic nineteenth-century figure of the hypocrite, his true brethren are the duplicitous, dark-skinned Tsalalians. Their program of intransigent revolt against the invasive program of white imperialist power embodied by Captain Guy's Antarctic expedition resembles that of the *Grampus* mutineers. It also resembles the intense hypocrisy through which Pym undermined his own white, imperialist, heterosexist culture of commodity and commercialism. "In truth," observes Pym, "from everything I could see of these wretches, they appeared to be the most wicked, hypocritical, vindictive, bloodthirsty, and altogether fiendish race of men upon the face of the globe" (*Writings*, 1:201). The Tsalalians are another demonic, intransigent race of men—like the race of melancholy among men and the *Grampus* mutineers—that actively defies, if not completely thwarts, the system of white male rule. Like Pym, they are hypocrites. By linking sexually ambiguous Pym to the Tsalalians through their shared scheme of hypocrisy, Poe, unwittingly or otherwise, suggests that the sexual Other and the racial Other share a common oppression and a common enemy: white patriarchy, or the Father.<sup>58</sup>

Nu-Nu, the captive Tsalalian who cowers in the boat as Pym and Dirk Peters plunge into the Antarctic abyss, expresses through his abject terror of whiteness a horror at the culture Pym and now, in part, Dirk Peters represent. But it is this very culture that Pym attempted to elude and that returns to claim him, the very culture that kills him off, just as it does Nu-Nu.<sup>59</sup> The shared hypocrisy of the racial Other and the sexually ambiguous, melancholy white male weirdly unite to outwit and elude the Father, to thwart the workings of patriarchal capitalist hegemony, through elaborate schemes of masking and inversion. That these schemes fail, that they are always already failed, helps to explain the mournful and treacherous atmosphere of the novel. If Dirk Peters undergoes a disappointing de-hybridization, hypocrisy undergoes

a strange and politically valuable hybridization. If patriarchy remains intact, the novel yet manages to memorialize a revolt, however haphazard and finally ineffectual, against it. The native's abject terror is the racialized counterpart to white male melancholia in the novel. For all of the novel's racism, and for all of the phobic prohibitions it places around male-male desire, it is nevertheless ultimately as transgressive as it is reactionary. Defying the codes of its own era, it comes surprisingly close to valorizing the audacious daring of racial and sexual hypocrisy.

I do not mean to suggest that the novel mourns the deaths of its nonwhite characters, only that it allows us to see that the deaths of beloved fellow white men can no more be mourned than theirs. The sheer number of the unmournable in *Pym* attests to the profoundly balked state of grief sustained, even in silence, throughout the novel and, more generally, in antebellum American culture. Perhaps it is with grief, more resonantly than any other theme, that Poe provided his most impassioned and incisive critique of the normative strictures that delimited and constrained the potentialities of gendered identity; in Poe, grief emerges as an allegory of the possibilities but also, and much more palpably, the limits of male love in American culture.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Joan Dayan's essay "Romance and Race," in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*, ed. Emory Elliot (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1991), 89–110. Dayan's major focus is not Poe's radicalism but his racism. In "Poe and Gentry Virginia: Provincial Gentleman, Textual Aristocrat, Man of the Crowd," David Leverenz persuasively argues for Poe's cultural importance as a satirist of class—the "gentry specters of a debased capitalist future" his chief targets—in a way that at least contextualizes Poe's failings; see *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, ed. Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1997), 81. Leland Person, noting that "scholars have devoted little attention to Poe's male characters," observes that his "depictions of men and male behavior reveal extraordinary tensions between a gentlemanly surface and volatile, even violent depths"; see "Poe and Nineteenth-Century Gender Constructions," in *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy (New York: Oxford, 2001), 150–51. The fullest treatment of Poe's representation of male sexuality would have to incorporate, on a much broader scale, the issues of his representation of women undertaken by Person and such critics as Dayan, Cynthia Jordan (*Second Stories: The Politics of Language, Form, and Gender in Early American Fictions* [Chapel Hill: North Carolina Univ. Press, 1989]), and Elisabeth Bronfen (*Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity, and the Aesthetic* [Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1992]).

<sup>2</sup>For discussions of a politically useful and disruptive disorganization of normative manhood, see Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge,

1992); Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1995); and Brett Farmer, *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, Gay Male Spectatorships* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2000).

<sup>3</sup>As Gustavus T. Stadler notes, Poe “continues to be absent from the map of gay and/or queer analyses of antebellum American culture,” a lacuna Stadler’s essay works to redress (“Poe and Queer Studies,” *Poe Studies/Dark Romanticism* 33 [2000]: 19–22).

<sup>4</sup>Caleb Crain summarizes the dilemma: “After the demise of queer theory, we still lack queer facts. There are still large gaps in our understanding of lesbian and gay lives, as lived in history and as represented in culture. . . . [M]ost of the work to be done is exactly the sort that queer theory abjured: it is just about us, and it involves identifications” (“On Queer Theory: Remarks at the New York Association of Scholars for Reasoned Discourse in a Free Society,” 18 September 1998; available online at <http://www.hermenaut.com/CrainC.shtml>). Recently, other queer readings of Poe have added to these debates. See Valerie Rohy, “Ahistorical,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12, no. 1 (2006): 61–83; and Brad Lint, “The Hermaphrodite in the Abyss: Queering Poe’s Pym,” *Edgar Allan Poe Review* 7 (Spring 2006): 49–61.

<sup>5</sup>Patrick E. Horrigan, *Widescreen Dreams: Growing Up Gay at the Movies* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 118.

<sup>6</sup>Michael Warner, *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1993), xxvi.

<sup>7</sup>Marie Bonaparte, in a passage that sums up her treatment of the novel, writes: “Only men appear in this tale, as might, however, be expected in a sea-story. Yet, as we shall see, the whole content of this story—as it was of Poe’s life—is the ardent and frenzied search—ever frustrated, ever renewed—for the lost mother: a mother always hidden, always present and made manifest here in those vast and universal symbols whose significance is unconsciously sensed by man.” Despite its considerable value and urgency, Bonaparte’s emphasis on the mother in this work ultimately has the effect of dispensing with the significance of a textual world with “only men” in it. The mother emerges as a method whereby Bonaparte can lend legitimacy to a same-sex world that would be utterly lacking it otherwise—an inescapably heterosexist maneuver. See Bonaparte, *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe: A Psycho-Analytic Interpretation* (London: Imago, 1949), 312.

In a compelling essay that finds in *Pym* a search for the “lost mother not as pathological and not as regressive but, rather, as an attempt to mourn and, in that attempt, to search for the self in order to emerge reborn out of the death experience,” Grace Farrell reorients the novel, in terms of current grief theory, as Poe’s attempts to redress his childhood exclusion from the conventions of mourning. I extend Farrell’s reading to a queer consideration of male-male mourning. See Farrell, “Mourning in Poe’s *Pym*,” in *Poe’s “Pym”: Critical Explorations*, ed. Richard Kopley (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1992), 112.

<sup>8</sup>See Bert Bender, *Sea-Brothers: The Tradition of American Sea Fiction from “Moby-Dick” to the Present* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 12.

<sup>9</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence (1840; New York: Anchor, 1959), 2:538.

<sup>10</sup>Herman Melville, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life*, ed. John Bryant (1846; New York: Penguin, 1996), 126.

<sup>11</sup>Melville, *Typee*, 253.

<sup>12</sup>See editor John Bryant's final note in the Penguin edition of *Typee*, 327–28.

<sup>13</sup>William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth et al. (New York: Norton, 1978), Book 11, pp. 27–31.

<sup>14</sup>Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Over-Soul," in *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983), 392.

<sup>15</sup>One of the few such references to an "intimate communion" between human beings that I have found is in Lydia Maria Child's story "The Eglantine," and here the phrase refers to a young woman's desire for male companionship, which is itself of interest. "More than ever," Child's narrator says of the heroine, Sybella, "she was oppressed with a sense of mental loneliness. Nature was inspiring, but it had no sympathy with the human soul, which longed for more responsive companionship, *more intimate communion*. The maiden needed a friend, into whose soul the calm sunset of the prairies would infuse the same holy light that penetrated her own. In such moods, the looks and tones of Edward Vernon came back with vivid distinctness." This communion differs from Pym's not only in its heterosexual orientation but also in its expression of a hopeful fantasy for communion, in contrast to the achieved communion represented in *Pym*. See Child, *Autumnal Leaves: Tales and Sketches in Prose and Rhyme* (New York: C. S. Francis, 1857), 32; emphasis added. Poe's language of intimate communion between men finds a remarkable echo in Herman Melville's response to Hawthorne's epistolary "review" of *Moby-Dick*. The image Melville uses of the shared communion cup and interchanged hearts, when taken along with Poe's theme of intimate communion, comes to seem highly suggestive for ways of interpreting same-sex desire in the language of feeling exchanged between men. See Melville, *Correspondence*, ed. Lynne Horth, vol. 14 of *The Writings of Herman Melville* (Evanston and Chicago: Northwestern Univ. Press and the Newberry Library, 1993), 212.

<sup>16</sup>In her influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak interrogates the class biases and witting and unwitting imperialism of postcolonial studies in relation to the subaltern classes—"the economic dispossessed"—for which it presumes to speak. Spivak's essay originally appeared in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg's *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

<sup>17</sup>See Katharine Snyder, *Bachelors, Manhood, and the Novel, 1850–1925* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 174.

<sup>18</sup>Horrigan, *Widescreen Dreams*, 118.

<sup>19</sup>See Jonathan Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991); and Leo Bersani's *Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1986).

<sup>20</sup>Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (1913; New York: Norton, 1989), 177.

<sup>21</sup>Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 179; emphases added.

<sup>22</sup>Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), in *General Psychological Theory*, ed. Philip Rieff (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 164–80.

<sup>23</sup>Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 64. Though space limitations preclude a discussion of them here, several innovative projects on the intersections of melancholia, race, and queer desire have been undertaken in the wake of Butler's retooled Freudian paradigms, and the fullest treatment of these themes in *Pym* would have to take them into account. See, especially, Douglas Crimp, *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001); Anne Anlin Cheng, *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001); *Loss: The Politics of Mourning*, ed. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2003) [the introductory essay provides an especially helpful updating, for queer theory purposes, of Freudian melancholia theory]; and Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2003). One of the many relevant directions in which Cvetkovich's work can take *Pym* is a consideration of the novel, *pace* Poe's animosity toward the genre, as a sentimental fiction with a vengeance, in which tears register rage as well as grief and mark an unspeakable, repressed trauma; see chap. 6.

<sup>24</sup>*Pym* may be ruefully if indirectly remarking upon the rejection of his grandfather when he examines his hypocritical conduct in this period with "sentiments of displeasure as well as surprise" (*Writings*, 1:66).

<sup>25</sup>For a discussion of the gendered significance of antebellum male emotionalism, see Eric Haralson's essay "Manly Tears: Men's Elegies for Children in Nineteenth-Century American Culture," in *Boys Don't Cry? Rethinking Narratives of Masculinity and Emotion in the U.S.*, ed. Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup>Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity* (1834; New York: Arno Press, 1974).

<sup>27</sup>See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," collected in her *Tendencies* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1993), 114.

<sup>28</sup>Graham, *Lecture to Young Men*, 58. See also Mary Gove [Nichols], *Solitary Vice: An Address to Parents and Those Who Have the Care of Children* (Portland: Printed at the Journal Office, 1839), which describes onanism as learned through same-sex tutelage and elides it with homoerotic threat. "Often there is a lamentable want of moral principle in those who indulge in the vice," though, Nichols adds, conscientious people do it, too (7). An uncontrollable desire to escape, in Nichols's Grahamian terms, a "diseased body and a deranged mind" doubtlessly has led many to commit suicide (10). A female correspondent told Nichols that she renounced the vice once married, thereby reclaiming her nearly vanquished health, but feels terrified for the young intimate who taught her the practice: her tutor has not stopped masturbating, even though she has

also married, and will probably soon expire (13). A combined fear of autonomous desire and same-sex sexual tutelage, then, informs Nichols's work, just as it does Graham's.

<sup>29</sup>For more discussions of the "spermatic economy," see G. J. Barker-Benfled, *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes towards Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Routledge, 1999), esp. chap. 15, 175-89. For a discussion of onanism and male sexuality generally in antebellum American literature, see David Greven, *Men beyond Desire: Manhood, Sex, and Violation in American Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>30</sup>Sedgwick, "Jane Austen," 111.

<sup>31</sup>Graham, *Lecture to Young Men*, 46, 52, 47, 49.

<sup>32</sup>Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 2000), 136.

<sup>33</sup>This Freudian process, for Fisher, has implications for the ways in which the passions become narrative: "Grief works itself out in time. It dissipates or exhausts itself." Analogously, revenge is the "work of anger," flight the "work of fear." But this work of working out the passions through time—inciting, enacting, and then allowing them to dissipate into memory—is only one of three narrative formulations of the passions. The two alternatives are 1) a narrative of "the sudden displacement of one passion by another" (for example, anger being replaced by mourning in *King Lear*) and 2) far more pervasively in literature, "the temporal importance of rashness and the narrative importance of acts of killing in the literature of the passions" (Philip Fisher, *The Vehement Passions* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2002], 89-91).

<sup>34</sup>If my analysis makes the expensive decision not to focus on the race-discourse aspects of the novel, this decision does not in any manner suggest that queer issues predominate or deserve more focus, or that the racial discourse of the novel does not in every conceivable manner always already intersect with the sexual one. Nevertheless, given considerations of space, I will not be able to do the Tsalal passages of the novel anything resembling justice in this essay. What I do wish to suggest about the novel's second half, however, is that, in textual—though not, of course, in ideological—terms, it is significantly less important than the first, and in fact largely exists to mirror and reinforce the themes of the first. The second half of the novel is a nightmarish version of the increasingly nightmarish dream of the first. It is, in effect, an oneiric statement about the themes and findings of the first half: that the processes and pain that occur in the first half of the novel occur in our culture unceasingly. A new captain, a new fraternity, a new chance: the same fate. The second half of the novel is literature as repetition-compulsion.

<sup>35</sup>Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 167-68, 169.

<sup>36</sup>Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 170, 171.

<sup>37</sup>Considering the description of Dirk Peters, Paul Gilmore likens Poe's work to P. T. Barnum's "What is It?" exhibit, which presented African American William Henry Johnson to the public and asked viewers to decide for themselves if he was "human or animal." Gilmore observes that rather "than simply drawing on grotesque stereotypes of blacks and Indians, Poe emphasizes their supposed biological difference through bowed

legs, deformed hands, and short stature" (*The Genuine Article: Race, Mass Culture, and American Literary Manhood* [Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2001], 110).

<sup>38</sup>Berenice's teeth are "red with the blood of the deed of castration" (Bonaparte, *Life and Works*), 338.

<sup>39</sup>Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 123; emphasis added.

<sup>40</sup>For Richard A. Levine, the "journey of Arthur Gordon Pym [is] the purgative journey of man: from shadow to light to salvation," a moralistic novel with a moral use of color schemes. Therefore, the hermaphrodite brig, "the black ship of plague death," represents the "death of the sinful": "it is of the type used by pirates; the ship is black; it has a cheap, tawdry gilt figure-head; the bodies aboard the ship were in a state of putrefaction; the corpses were of a saffron-like hue, a red-yellow" ("The Downward Journey of Purgation," *Poe Newsletter* 2 [April 1969]: 29–31).

<sup>41</sup>Given Poe's familiarity with classical writing, it is entirely plausible to suppose that he was aware of Tiresius, the seer who lived life alternately as male and female; Ovid's origin story of Hermaphroditus; and the freighted queer senses of the term "hermaphrodite," its interchangeability with such designations as "catamite" (see the *OED*). For the breadth of Poe's erudition, cultivated during his abbreviated years at the University of Virginia at Charlottesville, see Jeffrey Meyers, *Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Legacy* (New York: Scribner, 1992), 21–23. Poe, it seems to me, is using the term "hermaphrodite" for its broad range of sexual meanings—oddly, to describe both heterosexuality and threatening homosexuality. If Dirk Peters is refigured as a Male Mother, part of the novel's refit of fraternity as a self-sustaining, competitive system that can replace normative heterosexuality, then the novel imbues hermaphroditism with added significance. The historical figure of the Male Mother is part of a gender-bending continuum that includes the homosexual (especially when figured as The Third Sex of nineteenth-century sexologists) and the hermaphrodite. As Thomas L. Long notes of the medieval woman poet Julian of Norwich's meditations on the theme of Christ-as-Mother, there were many such medieval gender-bending figures: the Ovidian Hermaphrodite was another "transgendered deity," and the Hermaphrodite may also be seen as Christ, who combines God's male nature with humanity's feminine one. It is important to note that only the thinnest of boundaries separates the figure of the hermaphrodite from that of the homosexual. Long's essay is helpful for our purposes here, for he both foregrounds the messy overlap between homosexuality and hermaphroditism in relation to the Male Mother—which I would argue is a compensatory compromise between the two—and establishes a connection between classical antiquity's and Christianity's figuring of the Male Mother; see "Julian of Norwich's 'Christ as Mother' and Medieval Constructions of Gender," <http://historymedren.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://users.visi.net/%7Elongt/julian.htm>.

<sup>42</sup>This line is from chapter 17 of Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor*, ed. Dan McCall (New York: Norton Critical Editions, 2002), 137. Interestingly, Claggart's mixed feelings about Billy are signaled by his "incipient feverish tears," lachrymose



imagery forging another linkage between Melville's and Poe's evocation of homoerotic ties.

<sup>43</sup>See Sylvester Graham's tract *A Lecture on the Responsibility of Human Beings in the Exercise of Their Moral Power* . . . (Northampton: J. H. Butler, 1841), which rails against the intermingling of the sexes in the public sphere. A general ambivalence toward heterosociality pervaded antebellum culture, which was rigorously homosocialized. The sheer separateness of the separate spheres, as historians like Peter Gay and D. Michael Quinn remind us, had many effects. One of them was to render heterosexuality deeply exotic by strenuously Othering the opposite sex. As Gay writes: "[Nineteenth century America] fostered, even institutionalized, the segregation of young men and women . . . and idealized the differences. The two sexes . . . seemed to have distinct natures" (*The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*, vol. 2, *The Tender Passion* [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986], 215). See also Quinn's *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth Century Americans: A Mormon Example* (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1996).

<sup>44</sup>Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960; New York: Dell, 1966).

<sup>45</sup>Judith Butler asks that we consider the name as a "token of a symbolic order, an order of social law, that which legislates viable subjects through the institution of sexual difference and compulsory heterosexuality." As Butler writes, "the name as patronym does not only bear the law, but institutes the law . . . producing a subject." Insofar as it has the power to do so, the patronymic name produces the subject "on the basis of a prohibition, a set of laws that differentiates subjects through the compulsory legislation of sexed social positionalities." See *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 152, 154.

<sup>46</sup>Stadler, "Poe and Queer Studies," 22.

<sup>47</sup>Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1982), 33, 55, 33.

<sup>48</sup>Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 51.

<sup>49</sup>David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), 86–87.

<sup>50</sup>Of Poe's short story "William Wilson," which he places in the category of literature of hypocrisy, Reynolds writes: "The ultimate act of criminal aggression becomes the final act of suicidal despair. Instead of following the popular pattern of sympathizing with the justified criminal and his ugly doings, Poe watches how this criminal is tortured and finally destroyed by warring impulses in his own soul" (*Beneath the American Renaissance*, 235).

<sup>51</sup>John T. Irwin, *The Mystery to a Solution: Poe, Borges, and the Analytic Detective Story* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1994), 413.

<sup>52</sup>In her study of female masculinity in a book by that name, Judith Halberstam approaches nineteenth-century queer sexuality by deploying a method she names "perverse presentism," defined as "not only a denaturalization of the present but also

an application of what we do not know in the present to what we cannot know about the past" (*Female Masculinity* [Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1998], 53).

<sup>53</sup>Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 169.

<sup>54</sup>Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," 172–73.

<sup>55</sup>I am not in agreement with John Carlos Rowe's treatment of Dirk Peters: "Peters is Poe's fantasy of the faithful and graceful servant . . . the faithful 'half-breed' who discovers only the 'authority' of the white master." In my view, the novel places more emphasis on Peters as a force of queer rebellion against competing forms of masculinist authority than it does on his role as the "native informant." Overall, I find Rowe's authoritative essay finally hampered by indifference to the construction of male sexuality in the novel. See Rowe, "Poe, Antebellum Slavery, and Modern Criticism," in *Poe's "Pym,"* 130, 133. Though critics such as Rowe see *Pym* as an unremittingly racist project, Eric Savoy helpfully recuperates Poe's major works as "profound meditations on the cultural significance of 'blackness' in the white American mind." "A surprising amount of Poe's work," in Savoy's view, "may be said to Gothicize the deep oppression and violence inherent in his culture's whiteness and thus to transform America's normative race into the most monstrous of them all" ("The Rise of American Gothic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, ed. Jerrold E. Hogle [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002], 182).

<sup>56</sup>For Bonaparte, the sea is alternately the mother's life-giving blood or milk; throughout *Pym*, the "enigma to be deciphered is that of the mother's body" (*Life and Works*, 332, 347, 342). Also see line 141 of Walt Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," which calls the sea "the savage old mother" (*Complete Poetry and Collected Prose*, ed. Justin Kaplan [New York: Library of America, 1982], 392).

<sup>57</sup>Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 178.

<sup>58</sup>For a discussion of similar themes from a different, and highly interesting, perspective, see Cindy Weinstein's essay "When Is Now? Poe's Aesthetics of Temporality" in this issue of *Poe Studies*. Weinstein theorizes that Poe's manipulations of the novel's chronological order are significant to its multivalent levels of ambiguity and polarity: "Poe's aesthetics of temporality . . . replicates and enforces the arbitrary assertion of power, but at the same time problematizes it" (102).

<sup>59</sup>Postcolonial theory has powerful relevance for queer theory at this juncture: "If identity is performative, a product of discourse, and is therefore open to constant rearticulation, then the Others' capacity to recreate themselves in relation to a hegemonic culture is tied to their ability to produce and circulate discourses that elude the epistemological gaze of the dominant culture . . . [which] can give way to strategies of masking and inversion, of hybridity and deformation, through which the ethnic/colonial Others, even while offering themselves as specular reflections of the dominant one, rewrite and reposition themselves vis-à-vis their own and other cultures" (Ana María Manzanás and Jesús Benito, eds., *Intercultural Mediations: Hybridity and Mimesis in American Literatures* [Münster: Lit Verlag; Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2003], 72–73).