

The Problem of Mental Landscape in Edgar Allan Poe's *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym*

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Abstract:

The article attempts a formulation of the conditions of possibility for voyage as an epistemological method. The South Pole, the pole of discovery, seems to allow Pym to sublimate his oceanic passion, to turn the desire to die into a desire to know. All the hardships undergone seem to break the circle of his melancholy desires and passions, the ensuing freedom allowing Pym to travel differently, driven, this time, by the political, geographical or ethnographic interest, or curiosity. I argue that, by inscribing in the figure of desire the schema of rebellion and, vice versa, by describing rebellion (as transgression of a pact of submission or as violence) as a composite figure wherein desire is retraceable, the narrative tends to establish a relation of identity between the same and the other, between the individual (the protagonist) and society (the crew), the Civilised and the Barbarians. All in all, *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* can be construed either as a phenomenology of consciousness or as an odyssey of the spirit, witnessing the passage from immediate knowledge to ultimate knowledge. But what the text ironically reveals is that the condition of existence of this knowledge is self-ignorance.

Keywords: phenomenology; distress; desire; rebellion; sublimation; Edgar Allan Poe; Jean-Luc Marion.

With Poe, he who travels yields to the mysterious attraction of the shipwreck yet succeeds, more often than not, in an unexpected and miraculous way, to defer the fatal risk of the ocean. It is the time of exploration, of new sensations, of unknown territories (*terrae incognitae*), of sublime depths. (White, 2018: 2) The question is whether the unexplored site that the marooned person finds at the confines of the real and fantastic universe is geographical, or rather psychic in nature. It will never be made clear. (Stovall, 2009: 10) The narrative of the shipwreck is doubtless a referent which probably has no counterpart in the real, be it a marine or a geographical exteriority. Yet it seems to be an original epistemological method, investigating something which is not altogether unreal. (Wheeler, 2013: 4) How come is it possible, then, for a referent which is neither a given physical reality, nor an ideal one, of mathematical essence, to claim to his benefit an epistemological process, or, for that matter, for fiction to constitute a like process? (Bal, 2004: 31) This is the conundrum of the oceanic narratives.

The maritime odyssey envisages, seemingly, the development of a unique and repetitive problematic: that of *écriture*, in his relation of reciprocity with its founding basis, namely the discovery, ever mysterious, ever puzzling.

Mystery or conundrum, solvable enigma or abstruse puzzle, toward which of the two poles are we to situate Pym's Narrative? Without a compass, without a navigation map, the crew refuse to set sail for what they call "a chartless journey". Though managing to avoid a shipwreck, they are condemned to miss the discovery subsequent to it and feel compelled to settle with a hypothetical view of the supposed calendar and the chronological stages of creation. No wonder some of them are taken aback, in the long run, by their impossibility of establishing the cartography of the imaginary lands explored in *The Adventures of Pym*.

Mystery, mystification, puzzle, solvable or abstruse, complexity of sense, sense or non-sense: all these notions pertain to the Poesque terminology, to his theory of research and to his art of discovery. For Poe, every mystery is always soluble, whether it be a cryptogramme, where the clear meaning of the message is camouflaged under the obscure cipher which is its vehicle, or a detective enigma, where, setting out from clues, reason proceeds by inference to hunt down the truth. (Pinto, 2003: 29) The opposite of mystery is neither mystification, nor complication or non-sense, but either evidence, certainty (the queen in "The Purloined Letter" knows beyond any doubt who the thief is) or the ontological opacity of that which is inaccessible to human intelligence.

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As for mystification, its primary function is not dissimulation but luring, it aims at deceiving and two-timing the victim. (Renza, 2008: 2) It is true that, in the process, it may borrow its instruments from cryptography and use the latter's cipher. This is precisely the case with the short-story named "Mystification", where a fact must needs be underlined: Baron Von Yung doesn't deceive his victim by proposing an undecipherable cipher, allegedly meaningless and composed without any method. On the contrary, the cipher which constitutes the means of mystification has a meaning, and, by any type of intelligence other than Hermann's, and at least equal to the Baron's, this cipher could have been broken, while the text, manifestly absurd, could have been identified for what it was, namely a secret écriture concealing a clear message. (Levine, 2012: 89)

Moreover, mystification is revealed to hold a tight relationship to defiance, to the duel, to vengeance, in the last resort, consisting less in deceiving than in placing the adversary in an inferior position, under the merciless regard of a third, an accomplice. (Paulson, 2008: 62) Furthermore, it doesn't oppose mystery the way sense opposes non-sense, rather it involves an excess which allows the deceived victim to know the whys and whereofs of the deceit. By way of a provisional hypothesis, it seems convenient, then, to appropriate the supposition of an écriture of mystery, of the message concealed under the crypt of a cipher and of a dissemination of the clues.

With Poe, we assign the qualifier "mysterious" to the unknown signs of the secret écritures, to the sparse clues in the detective stories, to the dissociated figures of a crossword, to the separate pieces of a puzzle. If something forbids us to seek an overall and totalising meaning of a text, of a series or system of marks, if it is also useless to let oneself become entangled in a text's interminable network of references, this is so precisely because the limit to semantic totalisation is of a kind other than that of spurious infinity. (Carstea, 2022) This limit is that of the re-mark, we would say, in Derridean terms, and in a context where we have used the notion of dissemination repeatedly. Itself remarked inside the text under the structural form of the process of endless cross-referencing, it is a limit that comes about "through the angle and the intersection of a re-mark that folds the text back upon itself without any possibility of its fitting back over or into itself." (*Dissemination*, 1994: 251) It is the limit of syntax.

Syntax means here the arrangement, combination, and intimate connection of all the nuclear traits of the re-mark. The set of referential vectors the re-mark is henceforth woven of distinguishes the re-mark as a truly structuring agency. It is an agency whose sympleke is not unitary, not one, and not one of homogeneous material. The manner in which its elements are tied into one another prevents it from lending itself to a harmoniously balanced whole. Since this non-closure springs from the arrangement of its referential vectors, the very same structuring reasons impede its coinciding with itself. (Gasché, 2005)

Consequently, the apparently infinite field of Poe's texts of mystery is in fact the result of a limited sympleke of its major characterising traits. They are arranged in such a manner that in bypassing an organising centre, they are capable of infinite substitutability. The law of the play is structural, that is, a law of limited arrangements of the traits which, lacking a totalising centre, give rise to the necessary (on these conditions) possibility of infinite substitutions. Structural infinity, then, is a law that establishes a necessity for a possibility – infinite substitutability that hinges exclusively on finite reasons.

There is mystery every time fragmentation, rupture, dissemination, hiatus or dismemberment appear. (Silverman, 2013) Solving the mystery amounts to a discovery: reassembling, recomposing the liaison principle hidden or dissimulated in the aftermath of a deliberate or accidental dispersal. A duel wherein spirit confronts spirit. The solving of the mystery proves the command of the game strategy: whoever knew to best empathise with the adversary's spirit succeeded thus in uncovering the principle or the motif underlying his demeanour.

My name is Arthur Gordon Pym... (Works, 1993: 750)

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. (Works, 1993: 882)

In between the statement of identity and the encounter with the Unconceivable there are the vagations of Pym's destiny. A closer look at the first scene, aboard the Ariel and the Penguin is then required so as to witness the constitution of the matrix of the narrative. And matrix of Pym's destiny, for that matter, since all the essential figures in his (his)story are convened here: a drama of the proto-history which demands thorough inspection. (Quinn, 2015)

"[B]y way of introduction to a longer and more momentous narrative," the incipit is indispensable to the intelligibility of the history: it uncovers all the elements that will enable the retrospective reconstitution of a destiny to be accomplished: the surge of an intense desire to go to sea, followed by a fall and a breakdown, a shipwreck and the ensuing experience of social relations based on acts of cruelty and disobedience, lies and dissimulation.

As already announced, the drama of is sparked by the surge of an oceanic desire, whose essential component is analysed in the text. Its outcome is an unexpected redemption “which [is] attributed by the wise and pious to the special interference of the Providence,” interference with which Arthur seems not quite to agree at hindsight.

In between these two moments, we have the account of the most catastrophic situation which this desire resulted in. While in wait for the inheritance left by his maternal grandfather, who “had speculated very successfully in stocks of the Edgarton New Bank,” Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket goes to the school of old Mr. Ricketts. Judging by the matter-of-fact tone in the description of Pym’s state we are prompted into believing that, at least temporarily, Pym’s life is entirely goal-free. Until he has taken possession of a future inheritance, everything is provisional, time halts still, and nothing makes any difference.

A contemporary follower, but also contender of Jacques Derrida, Jean-Luc Marion has undertaken an extensive analysis which will permit us to situate and to evaluate such indifference from a philosophical point of view. To put it briefly, Marion sees indifference as a sidelong component and effect altogether of “boredom”. It follows, then, from boredom’s indifference to everything, that in this state of mind one is no longer affected by provocations of any sort, and least of all by essential provocations. As Marion (2011) holds, boredom is blind, lucidly blind, “blinded by its very lucidity”. It is blind in particular to all “amazement, stupor, bedazzlement, which alone allow the silent ‘voice’ of Being to make itself heard”. (Marion, 2011)

Jean-Luc Marion sees the gaze of boredom as it has found exemplary expression in Paul Valéry’s *Monsieur Teste*, and, along the same lines, we perceive it as a first step toward seeing the indifference with which Arthur Gordon Pym regards his present condition. The gaze of boredom, Marion claims in an analysis that implicitly, but also critically draws on Heidegger’s interpretation of this existential mood, is, indeed, an attitude in which all idols become disqualified and rejected for what they are, namely, idols of the visible (yet without boredom’s being already in possession of what Marion calls the icon of the invisible).

In conformity with Heidegger’s claim that “genuine boredom”, “profound boredom”, “removes all things and men and oneself along with it into a remarkable indifference”, and that in it “everything about us seems so hopelessly commonplace that we no longer care whether anything is or is not”, boredom is indifferent primarily to what is, to beings, its own being included.

It abandons, so far as to abandon itself, with neither love nor hate, through pure indifference”, Marion writes, and he adds, “Before the fact that being is, boredom does not budge, does not see, does not respond. Boredom does not suffer any exception to its crepuscular gaze, and the being purely there forms no exception. No idol before boredom, not even the unsurpassable spectacle of a given being. But, as nothing more essential than given being...can ever appear, boredom will never manifest itself more absolutely than in its uninterest for the given being. Boredom, which lends no interest to given being itself, and undoes itself from that which gives given being. (*L’idole et la distance*, 2011: 98)

Coming back where we left off, namely at Mr. Ricketts’ school, which Arthur attended, we bear witness to a situation which will shake off Arthur’s existential indifference, i.e. Heideggerian boredom. At school, he becomes friends with Mr. Barnard’s son, Augustus. The latter often entertained him with his adventures in the South Pacific Ocean:

I used frequently to go home with him, and remain all day and sometimes all night. We occupied the same bed, and he would be sure to keep me awake until almost light, telling me stories...At last, I could not help being interested in what he said, and by degrees I felt the desire to go to sea. (Works, 1993: 750)

So, it is Augustus and his more or less invented stories that sound the alarm for Arthur and stir up the oceanic passion in him. Augustus’s words alone, heard especially at night, acquire the status of a law, the law of desire and of Pym’s destiny. (Pollin, 2014) This is the potency of Augustus’s words, omnipotent through his voice. It is within a language experience, where the friend projects his own desire, that the obscure drive is born, to replace the projection as well as to appropriate someone else’s desire (even if the first voyage is done in co-participation and under the former’s protection).

But for how long will Augustus lodge the privileged pole enunciated by his words? We will anticipate and will refer to chapter XIII, where this character disappears. Augustus’s corpse, in an advanced state of decomposition, “a mass of putrefaction,” is thrown overboard by Peters, while

an entire leg came off in his grasp. The glare of light, the narrative continues, discovered to us seven or eight large sharks, the clashing of whose terrible teeth, as their prey was torn to pieces among them, might have been heard at the distance of a mile. We shrunk within ourselves in the extremity of horror at the sound. (Works, 1993: 826)

Has Pym appropriated Augustus's desire to such an extent that he suffers the self-same treatment he describes? One more detail: during the voyage beneath the deck, Augustus lost all his credibility in Arthur's eyes. Maybe even before that, in the first scene aboard the *Ariel*. But, on the other hand, wouldn't his sadistic way of disposing of him, by enclosing him beneath deck, point to a desire to wish into disappearance the one who was at the basis of his own desire?

If we take the latter as a working hypothesis, then we would have to analyse why and how, throughout the troubled history of their relations, Pym entered in competition with the initiator of his oceanic longing. Both the initiator and the initiated aim for the same thing, which hides underneath the desire to go to sea and for which they become rivals to its acquisition. From a position of omnipotent and chaperoning alterity, Augustus is compelled to recede to a less prestigious one, as symbolised by his loss of weight: "Although he weighed one hundred and twenty pounds upon leaving Nantucket, he only weighed forty or fifty pounds now, at the most." (Works, 1993: 826)

What triggered this regression? Leaving aside for a moment the answer to this question, we will come back to the drive propelled by Augustus's words, to the moment when, though in its prime, it hooks in the catastrophe of the proto-history. After a party, during which they had both drunk heavily, the two adolescents go to bed without Augustus tackling, this time, his favourite subject. A silence evincing the signs of a subsequent upsurge of passion, since he will soon propose to his bed companion to go out on a frolic with the boat. Unaware of Augustus's degree of drunkenness, Arthur feels "a thrill of the greatest excitement and pleasure, and thinks his mad idea to be one of the most delightful and most reasonable things in the world." (Works, 1993: 751)

And there they are, starting boldly out to sea, aboard the *Ariel*. Then, catastrophe time: the sudden metamorphosis of excitement into despondency, of awaiting pleasure into serious alarm, into trepidation and ultimately into sheer dread: "[I] was now depending entirely upon the nautical skill of my friend." (Works, 1993: 751) The first element of anxiety, or of the transformation of the thrilled expectancy of pleasure into a dangerous situation is the feeling of dependence: "I was entirely depending." Augustus, who had been assigned the task of fulfilling a wish and had been trusted with the navigation, loses all revendication of self-forbearance and credibility.

Arthur's disillusionment is in fact a brutal revelation of the actual reality, and vicariously, Augustus's lack of possession of his senses is due to the disappearance of the faith attached to his power, to the awareness of his own limits: "The whole truth now flashed upon me. He was drunk – beastly drunk – he could no longer either stand, speak, or see." (Works, 1993: 752) Essentially, Augustus is unable to hold up the role assigned to him by Pym: that of managing the ship whose owner, significantly enough, was Arthur Pym, to govern the destiny of the one who had entrusted the fulfilment of his wish to him.

But a second element of distress springs forth: Pym's inability to ensure, by any efficient action, the carrying out of the navigation tasks necessary for survival.

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When, ultimately, Arthur overcomes his anxiety and "takes the helm, a loud and long scream or yell, as if from the throats of a thousand demons, seemed to pervade the whole atmosphere around and above the boat." (Works, 1993: 753) Shriek and uproar of demons, perceived before all possible intellectualisation, experienced through an intense agony of terror. (Meitinger, 2000) Arthur, who had first devolved the taking care of his life and desire to his friend, attempts, vainly, to achieve self-mastery. Black-out, provisional death, Pym's destiny is headed for further abandonments.

Desire and distress: this is the lesson which the adventure aboard the *Ariel* teaches Arthur. The fulfilment of desire demands the faculty of entrapment, of dissimulation and deceit, the indifference. The cessation of distress is only rendered possible by the unexpected shock, the saving encounter with a rebellious crew. The alternance of expectancy and depression stops short at the advent of the Event, which reveals the dual nature of the mutiny, both objective and subjective. (Leys, 2002: 56-7)

A systematic reconstruction of Pym's destiny stands, therefore, in dire need of supplementation by yet other parameters of the character's desire. First of all, the episode of the incognito voyage beneath the ship's deck (chs. II-IV) delves in the phenomenology of desire and distress, confirming at the same time the presence of the schema of rebellion of hypocrisy in the figure of desire. (Lisøe, 2005: 53)

This phenomenology exposes the fact that the correlative of desire is not an object, but a phantasm: “visions”, whose sole reason why is death, under all forms anticipatory of it:

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 grey and desolate rock, in an ocean unapproachable and unknown. Such visions and desires – for they amounted to desires – are common, I have since been assured, to the whole numerous race of the melancholy among men... (Works, 1993: 757)

This fantasised realisation of the desire to travel and to see oneself suffering permits us the first analytic approximation: the voyage beneath the deck of the *Grampus* is a journey taken in the deeper recesses of the self. (Muller and Richardson, 2008) Let us note, tangentially, that the depart was rendered possible by means of an entrapment, a particularly devious lie: Mr. Peterson (Arthur’s grandfather), symbol of the parental authority, is induced into believing that he is blinded, or at least little clairvoyant on account of his new spectacles.

Once aboard the *Grampus* and ushered beneath the deck, in an oblong crate, purposefully arranged for him by Augustus, Arthur is free to finally indulge in his desire, in his “visions”. Augustus, with his perverse solicitude, takes personally care of that. Besides the symbolical location where he arranged his friend’s hide-out, we have to remark the nature of the provisions he leaves for Arthur, before returning on deck, in pursuit of his own destiny:

a large jug full of water, a keg of sea-biscuit, three or four immense Bologna sausages, an enormous ham, a cold leg of roast mutton, and half a dozen bottles of cordials and liqueurs. Something to appease and quench hunger and thirst by, if only they hadn’t been so liable to going rapidly rotten... (Works, 1993: 761)

And hence the mentioning of sleep, dreams, anxiety, distress: a phantasmatic related to the only form of privation which Arthur’s desire hadn’t predicted: the oppression of the lungs. An enhancement of distress: to the shortage of air, the absence of the only person aboard who might have eased it, is added. Anxiety about the unexplainable loss of affection: Arthur can’t help accuse Augustus of the meanest indifference and can think of no reason why he didn’t come visit.

Second of all, the events aboard the *Grampus* (IV-VII) contribute insight into another ambivalence: that of the schema of rebellion. It seems to perform two distinct functions, depending on whether it refers to the internal dynamics of the subject or to the objective act perpetrated by the other and which tends to upset the order of the already extant social relations: with respect to the subject, the rebellion is a principle of breaking limits, transgressing the laws and the parental prohibitions [yet it is also the catalysing potency or the energy without which Arthur would be incapable of satisfying his desire to travel]. With respect to the social world, it is an objective event, determined by the will of the others (the crew of the *Grampus*, that of the *Penguin*, the *Tsalalians*). It can either privilege the subject’s desire (the episode aboard the *Ariel*) or impose a vigorous denial upon it (due to the mutiny of the crew, Pym will not succeed in getting his desire to travel legitimised by the representative of the parental authority, namely Captain Barnard).

And if a further ventured inference may be allowed, we would say that, if the rebellion was legitimate, or legitimisable or at least excusable as long as the protagonist acknowledges it as the principle for his acts, it becomes demoniacal violence, subversion of the law, abominable treachery the moment he accuses others of it. The intensity of desire, the length of time outside real time that it took to phantasmatically realise a long-cherished dream can, without any doubt, serve as an excuse for everything, for disobedience, even dissimulation and hypocrisy. (Bozzetto, 2000; Chareyre-Méjan, 2000)

Contrariwise, the destruction plan conceived by the others, regardless of their underlying motives, is argument enough to consider its authors “among the most barbarous, subtle, and blood-thirsty wretches that ever contaminated the face of the globe.” (Works, 1993: 859)

At a rush perusal, we would be tempted to acquiesce to a more or less conspicuous cleavage between the self (whose law is the desire) and the non-self (whose law is the rebellion), the subject and the alterity, the hero and his foes (Pym vs. the drunk sailors, then vs. the Barbarians), the former undertaking a legitimate or partially legitimisable action, the latter being utterly denied such an act, on grounds of it stemming from violence, from cruelty or treachery.

At a more attentive perusal, and taking into account the double insight offered by the text into the two mentioned schemas: that of desire and that of rebellion, the immediate conspicuousness of this cleavage gets blurred. It is difficult to read the narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym without tending, more or less automatically, to place it in a psychoanalytic frame, without thinking, for example, of Augustus’s investment in the projection of his desire in conflictual terms, or of Arthur’s desire to hunt down what we might call the “real” (in Lacanian terms),

as a wish to recover a presence or origin that in principle cannot be recuperated but only fantasized and displaced. (Lacan, 1982)

What Pym's desire to travel reveals is, on the one hand, the taste for suffering and death which seems to be inherent in it. The infinity inscribed at the core of this desire is that of the void, of the absorption into it, that "frees the story from the reigns of silence". (Ducey, 2021: 22) An adumbration of this experience is, doubtless, the blackout caused by the temptation to look down into the abyss, precisely because there is a ban on looking down, under the death penalty: consequently, at the core of desire, there is the reversal of the law, the violence directed at the self.

At the basis of rebellion, on the other hand, is the will to subvert the dominance relations founded on the law, the hope "for profit and pleasure", the expectancy of a "world of novelties and amusements."

By inscribing in the figure of desire the schema of rebellion and, vice versa, by describing rebellion (as transgression of a pact of submission or as violence) as a composite figure wherein desire is retraceable, the narrative tends to establish a relation of identity between the same and the other, between the individual (the protagonist) and society (the crew), the Civilised and the Barbarians. An identity based on a common taste, a common thirst, that of blood, since the sequentiality of events in the chapters under analysis proves that the subtlety and the blood thirst qualify Pym to the same extent:

Let it suffice to say that, having in some measure appeased the raging thirst which consumed us by the blood of the victim, and having by common consent taken off the hands, feet, and head, throwing them into the sea...we devoured the rest of the body piecemeal. (Works, 1993: 819-20)

A cumbersome passage, by all standards, all the more so as it immediately follows the narration of events which make Arthur dismiss the Tsalalians as abominable brutes. Mimesis, mimicking or ironic caricature? In order to be able to at least measure swords with this analytical conundrum, I shall draw on Sándor Ferenczi's reassessment of the Medusa myth, hoping that it would allow us an inkling of the possible explanation. After faithful observations of certain clinical cases, gathered in a *Clinical Diary*, Ferenczi advanced the idea of traumatic imitation as ironic caricature or grimace, as if in identifying with the aggressor, the traumatised person, at least at first, preserved intact a defiant, observing ego:

Now, in situations where protest and negative reaction, that is, all criticism and expression of discontent, is forbidden, criticism can find expression only in an indirect form. For example, the opinion, "You are all liars, idiots, lunatics, who can't be trusted", is illustrated indirectly on oneself through exaggerated, crazy behaviour and nonsensical productions, rather like the child who in grimacing distorts himself but only to show the other how he looks...The child recognises at an early age the absurdities in the behaviour of those in authority over him, yet intimidation precludes the exercise of criticism.

Ironic exaggeration, the nature of which is not recognized by the environment, remains the only means of expression. The question remains of how and when the irony of the expressions becomes unconscious for the child as well. The insane "superego", being or becoming imposed upon one's own personality, transforms the previous irony into automatism. (Ferenczi, 1998: 50)

Ferenczi here imagined traumatic mimicry as a kind of conscious simulation which only becomes unconscious and involuntary over time. This model of mimicry as ironic caricature or simulative grimace, though being altogether a somatic manifestation, is not, as it might seem, at odds with our ordinary model of imitation, which is of a behavioural nature. For here is what Ferenczi suggests, further on: if the subject imitates the aggressor, by assuming his contemptuous and aggressive behaviour, s/he is in fact unaware that s/he is mirroring him/her in that way. At this point, Ferenczi's interpretation of splitting hovers between an ideal of self-observation and a notion of blind immersion in the violence and irrationality of the threatening other. And "the most potent motive of repression, in almost all cases, is an attempt to make a sustained injury not have happened", Ferenczi states in an astonishing passage in the *Clinical Diary*:

Another, perhaps even more potent motive is identification out of fear – one must know the dangerous opponent through and through, follow each of his movements, so that one can protect oneself against him. Last not least: an attempt will be made to bring to his senses even a terrifying, raging brute, whose behaviour suggests drunkenness or insanity.

When the Medusa, threatened with decapitation, makes a horrible angry face, she is actually holding up a mirror to the bestial attacker, as though she were saying: This is how you look. In the face of the aggressor, one has no weapons; and no possibility exists of instructing him or bringing him to reason in any other way. Such deterrence by means of identification (holding up a mirror) may still help at the last moment. (ta twam asi: this art thou)." (CD, 1998: 177)

In the classical myth Medusa is killed not by a terrifying, raging brute but by the hero Perseus, which is to say that Ferenczi's retelling of the myth gives us a Perseus already infected by (already insensibly "mimicking") the monster he is seeking to kill (it is exactly what Pym ends up doing, through repetition of precisely those acts which he abhorred and dispelled as brutish). Moreover, insofar as a mirrored surface figures in the myth – it does, centrally, in the form of Perseus's bright, reflecting shield – the mirror is held up not by Medusa, as Ferenczi writes, but by Perseus, who deflects the Medusa's monstrous gaze back at her, thereby (presumably) paralysing her so that he is able to cut off her head. And this implies in turn, as Ferenczi's own conclusion prompts us into believing, that mutual identification of the two antagonists (Pym and the Tsalalians) was already complete before the narrative events got underway.

But, the recollection of the deed plunges the doer into utter remorse, and this is the reason why he wards it off with almost panicky, hysterical accents:

It is with extreme reluctance that I dwell upon the appalling scene which ensued; a scene which, with its minutest details, no after-events have been able to efface in the slightest degree from my memory, and whose stern recollection will embitter every future moment of my existence. (Works, 1993: 820)

Gilles Deleuze (2003) performed a particularly fine, formal analysis of similar hysterical elements in Bacon's paintings, the rendering visible of those hidden, convulsive forces which seize the body in its flight from panic. Psychoanalysis maintains that the hysteria simply represses. So that it falls to the body (to the memory, in Pym's case) to expel those phobic monstrosities which the mind simply cannot acknowledge: they are voided, denied or denied description: "Let me run over this portion of my narrative with as much haste as [possible]..." (Works, 1993: 818)

Julia Kristeva, in her book *Powers of Horror* provides a better guide to the overall cultural position on the above-mentioned aspects. She focuses upon "abjection", a state of giddy instability and fear which is precipitated when the symbolic order regulating our identity unexpectedly collapses. Abjection denotes acute fear and disgust of a pathological kind, obsessive and recurrent in our lives, triggered by the "abominable and filthy" with which we are unable to cope. (Kristeva, 1992)

Clearly likened to hysteria, abjection describes the panicky, twisting aside and away from those "things" which burn and mutilate our self-possession. It is not so much repression in a classical sense as rejection, something more violent, jolting, and immediate in its aggression on the body. It is an interior cataclysm which we repulse because it is in its turn "repulsive": "the appalling scene... will embitter every future moment of my existence." (Works, 1993: 820)

Reactive, almost reflexive on account of uncontrollable nervous discharge, the abject feels split between a self and internalized otherness which s/he attempts to expel. This split or Ich-spaltung destroys the fundamental subject-object boundary which both preserves subjective identity as such and keeps the world at bay. So that, according to Julia Kristeva, the abject is in fact split between subject and object, neither fully an independent self nor completely determined by the objective realm, falling uncontrollably between both.

So much of what Pym does and says is silently governed in this respect by what he turns away from, because the hysterical governance of waking life is vigilant and absolute, while being also intimate, enfolded in domestic commonplace, a flickering or a suction or a vertiginous arching out among the ordinary rhythms of the day. Moments of falling, moments of loss, instants when time bloats and space distresses: "Let me run over this portion of my narrative with as much haste as [possible]..." (Works, 1993: 820)

Abjection, like repression, is a function of social symbolic order and never merely a subjective matter. The grid of cultural definition is neither uniform nor seamless. In that vast, reticulated structure of signs which maps out our social world there are warps and vortices where subjectivity can be pitched unexpectedly into panic. Such mises-en-abyme are simultaneously historical and psychological. Never merely individual, they nevertheless convulse the individual, slewing the body as it drops between the hard edges of social order.

Setting out from such reading hypotheses, we are now able to establish the connections inside the text which give a structure and organise the episodes of the first act: beneath the deck, a voyage into the inner depths, while the phenomenology of distress brings about the first revelation: the perverseness.

We gave way both of us to despair, weeping aloud like children, and neither of us attempting to offer consolation to the other. [...] But it must be remembered that our intellects were so entirely disordered by the long course of privation and terror to which we had been subjected, that we could not justly be considered in the light of rational beings. In subsequent perils, nearly as great, if not greater, I bore up with fortitude against all the evils of my situation, and Peters, it will be seen, evinced a stoical philosophy nearly as incredible as his present childlike supineness and imbecility. (Works, 1993: 828)

Will they eventually succeed in overcoming their weakness and summon their courage? The second act – “Southward” – while partially providing an answer, accompanies it by yet another question: what can we make of the inner change which broadens the horizon of the voyage and sets up different parameters for the analysis of its destination and its ultimate goal? “Southward”: delivered from the grips of melancholy and of his death-drive, of his visions of deserts, Pym (now having by his side a sturdier companion than the previous one, endowed, furthermore, with a stoic wisdom) assigns a new finality to his voyage:

“Discovery”: of course, a wide field lay before us for discovery, and it was with feelings of most intense interest that I heard Captain Guy express his resolution of pushing boldly to the southward. (Works, 1993: 843)

The South Pole, the pole of discovery, will allow Pym to sublimate his oceanic passion, to turn the desire to die into a desire to know. Moreover, from chapter XIV on, all the hardships undergone seem to break the circle of his melancholy desires and passions, the ensuing freedom allowing Pym to travel differently, driven, this time, by the political, geographical or ethnographic interest or curiosity.

“Southward”: if, officially, the South is the pole of curiosity and of discovery, we can’t help asking what the nature of this discovery might be. Is it of the order of knowledge or of science? Which is the pole of the scientific interest which will enable Pym to escape the real, the given, the encountered reality, to bracket the outside world and step into the inside world, with its internalised geography and archipelagos?

Before risking a final formulation of the question regarding the conditions of possibility for voyage as an epistemological method – what I am trying to come to grips with here lends itself to, and invites, an interminable analysis, not because of its depth, unfathomableness, but because it escapes, by its very nature, all subsumption under standard categories of thought (a hint at the limits of any analytical grid) – let me briefly return to the empirical data, to factuality, because it “reveals the possibility of establishing continuities on a philosophical-aesthetic plane”. (Anghel, 2021: 35)

The sequence of events in the last chapters of the narrative establish the following course for Pym’s ship: from the Isles Kerguelen, charted on the maps of real geography, to the Isle of Bennet, nowhere to be found except on the imaginary map of mythical geography, not before having made a detour in search of the Isles Aurora, unreachable, because inexistent and ending in an anamnesis of the real, historic expeditions southward (ch. XIV-XVII).

If the Auroras are *stricto sensu* utopical, inexistent, their discovery would have possibly indicated – although there is no clue in the text that would confirm the hypothesis – the entry-place into the internal world, the world of perfection and whiteness, alluded to in Symmes’s utopia. But this possibility, as the ending of *The Adventures* will make clear, is entirely discarded. The second act, “Southward”, will acknowledge the failure.

The darkness had materially increased, relieved only by the glare of the water thrown back from the white curtain before us. [...] And now we rushed into the embraces of the cataract, where a chasm threw itself open to receive us. (Works, 1993: 882)

At the pole of territorial novelty, the object of the entire (re)search is finally revealed: the originary pole, the matricial pole, whereof this type of subjectivity, motivated by and programmed to travel.

All in all, *The Adventures of Arthur Gordon Pym* can be construed either as a phenomenology of consciousness or as an odyssey of the spirit: witnessing the passage from immediate knowledge to ultimate knowledge. But what the text ironically reveals is that the condition of existence of this knowledge is self-ignorance.

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