

The Pre-Raphaelites and Imperialism:
John Everett Millais's *Pizarro Seizing the Inca of Peru*,
The Boyhood of Raleigh, and *The North-West Passage*

Joseph A. Kestner

It is not 'an overstatement to assert that the nineteenth century began and ended with an obsession about exploration. One may cite the ruminations of Robert Walton in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* of 1818 as a *locus classicus* of this preoccupation:

I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man. These are my enticements, and they are sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death.... I have read with ardour the accounts of the various voyages which have been made in the prospect of arriving at the North Pacific Ocean through the seas which surround the pole. (16)

The object of Walton's voyage is to navigate the Arctic, specifically to find the Open Polar Sea or the North West Passage or the North Pole. The interest in polar navigation had already been stimulated by Coleridge in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* as early as 1798, when the mariner was driven to the South Pole:

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken –
The ice was all between.
The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound! ...
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steered us through! (lines 51-54, 57-62, 69-70)

Two months after the publication of *Frankenstein*, John Franklin began "polar

The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies, 4 (Spring 1995)