



A COLERIDGE COMPANION

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Critical Approaches to *The Ancient Mariner*

We do not sufficiently understand the story to analyse it. (Southey)

Poetry gives most pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood. (Coleridge)¹

[152] For its earliest critics *The Ancient Mariner* frustrated interpretation because it defeated expectation. It was first published at a time when "Germany was [being] poured forth into England, in all [153] her flood of skulls and numsculls";² and, naturally enough, it was read against the background of Gothic supernaturalism made fashionable by Schiller and Bürger, "Monk" Lewis and the horrid mysteries of Mrs Radcliffe's novels. In this context *The Ancient Mariner* inevitably appeared an enigma and a failure: its complexity was comfortably construed to be obscurity, its departures from conventional expectation were adjudged defects, and its disturbing power was dismissed as extravagance. Robert Southey's curt depreciation in the *Critical Review* for October 1798 is entirely typical of early critical reaction:

This piece appears to us perfectly original in style as well as in story. Many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful; but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible We do not sufficiently understand the story to analyse it. It is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity. Genius has here been employed in producing a poem of little merit.³ Since *The Ancient Mariner* could not be slotted neatly into any existing ballad-classification, the easiest solution was simply to invoke custom and convention to declare the work incomprehensible.

The only significant exception in this early stream of adverse criticism is Charles Lamb. "I am sorry", Lamb wrote to Southey in November 1798, "you are so sparing of praise to the 'Ancient Marinere;' -- so far from calling it, as you do, with some wit, but more severity, 'A Dutch Attempt,' &c., I call it a right English attempt, and a successful one, to dethrone German sublimity" (*LL*, i 142). This is an acute perception. Although he had objections to some (unspecified) "unmeaning miracles" in the poem, Lamb was instinctively aware that Coleridge had struck a new note in English poetry. Two years later in a letter to Wordsworth (30 Jan. 1801), Lamb continued his praise for *The Ancient Mariner*: "For me, I was never so affected with any human Tale. After first reading it, I was totally possessed with it for many days. -- I dislike all the miraculous part of it, but the feelings of the man under the operation of such scenery dragged me along like Tom Piper's magic Whistle" (*LL*, i 266). By 1801, of course, Wordsworth had come to think *The Ancient Mariner* an albatross around the neck of his *Lyrical Ballads* and had appended to Coleridge's poem a long note on its "great defects" (see above, [p. 112](#)). Lamb went on to refute Wordsworth's criticisms at some length and with some spirit, concluding "You will excuse my remarks, because I am hurt and vexed [154] that you should think it necessary, with a prose apology, to open the eyes of dead men that cannot see---" (*LL*, i 266). Wordsworth did not, however, excuse Lamb's remarks: "The Post did not sleep a moment", Lamb told Thomas Manning. "I received almost instantaneously a long letter of four sweating pages . . ." (*LL*, i 272).⁴

Lamb's comments on *The Ancient Mariner* are equally interesting for what they say and what they do *not* say. He admires the poem, he is moved by it -- but he does not attempt to interpret it. Indeed, the question of "meaning" never raises its head: he talks only of his *experience* of the poem, of being "totally possessed" by it for many days. Lamb's response, in fact, after the initial flurry of negative criticism of 1798-1801 had vented itself, set the tone for almost every critical assessment of *The Ancient Mariner* during the nineteenth century. An acquaintance with the poem and admiration for it are critical presuppositions from about 1817 onward;⁵ but for nineteenth-century readers it remained a work beyond the grasp of rational understanding: To speak of it at all is extremely difficult; above all the poems with which we are acquainted in any language, it is a poem to be felt, cherished, mused upon, not to be talked about, not capable of being described, analyzed, or criticised. It is the wildest of all the creations of genius, it is not like a thing of the living, listening, moving world, the very music of its words is like the melancholy mysterious breath of something sung to the sleeping ear, its images have the beauty, the grandeur, the incoherence of some mighty vision.⁶ The "meaning" of the poem, that is to say, is experiential; it is not something detachable from its dramatic context but is, rather, inextricably bound up with

the richness and terror of the Mariner's whole experience -- an experience which the reader, like the fascinated Wedding-Guest, both understands and shares vicariously. In other words, the meaning of *The Ancient Mariner* depends not upon the poem's events or characters but upon the *effect* of these events and characters on the reader: and the critical approach involved here amounts, in effect, to an unformulated version of reader-response theory.

The general reluctance -- or inability -- to find a definable meaning in *The Ancient Mariner* began to disappear during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. In a hesitant trickle at [155] first, which shortly became a respectable stream and grew eventually into a swollen torrent, excited readers found the enchanted fabric of the Mariner's world to be inwrought with figures dim. Patterns of meaning emerged, were captured and tamed into expository prose, were refined and developed and expanded by successive generations of interpreters. At last *The Ancient Mariner* made sense -- or at least "sense" could be made of it. But as meanings proliferated, their very plurality became a problem. If *The Ancient Mariner* had an ulterior meaning or purpose, then what was it? For some, it was a religious or ethical poem; for others, it was a psychological, even autobiographical, study of guilt and terror; and, for still others, it was concerned with philosophy, or aesthetic theory, or politics. But diversity is not necessarily self-defeating. Indeed, there have been able defences of a wide variety of possible interpretations, and what emerges most clearly from an overview of criticism during the last hundred years is not the failure of critics to agree on a single reading but the depth and complexity of the poem itself which can, without contradiction, embrace and harmonise and sustain such connotative diversity. Although it resists reductionism, *The Ancient Mariner* encourages critical variety -- as a glance at the main lines of interpretation will clearly show.

Undoubtedly the most popular approach holds that *The Ancient Mariner* is, by design and intention, a spiritual allegory depicting human life as a sort of Pilgrim's Progress on the sea: "the Ancient Mariner -- who is at once himself, Coleridge and all humanity -- having sinned, both incurs punishment and seeks redemption".⁷ Some critics (especially the earlier ones) develop this theme in a crudely allegoric fashion, drawing one-to-one correspondences between events and their significance: the slaying of the albatross = Original Sin; the Hermit = the idea of enlightened religion; etc.⁸ Most recent critics, however, influenced by Robert Penn Warren's important essay (1946),⁹ have turned from allegorical to symbolic readings of the poem's moral and spiritual dimensions. Nevertheless, at the heart of all these interpretations -- whether allegoric or symbolic -- lies the conviction that the poem is "about" the orthodox Christian progression from sin and the recognition of sin, through repentance and punishment, to such redemption as is possible in this world.¹⁰ Beyond this, however, there is little agreement. Robert Penn Warren, for example, who stresses that in Coleridge's sacramental conception of the [156] universe (i.e. the "One Life") a crime against Nature is a crime against God, finds in the Fall an analogy for the Mariner's symbolic killing of the albatross: "what is at stake . . . is not the objective magnitude of the act performed -- the bird is, literally, a trivial creature -- but the spirit in which the act is performed, the condition of the will".¹¹ Thus, although the Mariner's deed is unmotivated, he is none the less responsible for it, for, like Adam, he possesses free will.¹² But is this really so? J.A. Stuart, for one, does not

think so: the Mariner is one of those predestined to election -- a man who, having sinned, is led inexorably by the hand of indefectible grace through an Augustinian process of justification and sanctification.¹³ Edward Bostetter, however, who rejects both Warren's sacramentalism and Stuart's predestinarianism, argues vigorously that the spiritual forces at work in the Mariner's authoritarian universe are despotic and unpredictable. It is a nightmare world of inconsequence, terror and meaningless suffering through which the Mariner moves, a world governed by chance, where caprice is the decisive factor -- as the dice-game between Death and Life-in-Death for the Mariner and his shipmates makes clear. It is, in essence, the Christian universe gone mad, and reveals, according to Bostetter, "Coleridge's fundamental uncertainty and doubt about the universe of love and law".¹⁴ But James D. Boulger takes issue with Bostetter and with Warren as well. Stressing the dream-logic of the poem and the purely imaginative and mysterious dimensions of the Mariner's experience, Boulger presents a strong case for believing that the "world of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is neither a sacramental universe [Warren] nor a nightmare vision [Bostetter], but a parable of the uneasy Christian skepticism that has been with us since Newton and Kant". Indeed, he argues, *The Ancient Mariner* can lay claim to being "the first modern religious poem in the sense that it asserts a mysterious religious universe but cannot give us even a partial explanation of its nature".¹⁵ Now, since Warren, Stuart, Bostetter and Boulger all throw light on the poem and articulate, though in exaggerated form, aspects of its religious theme which most readers would agree are present in one way or another, it seems obvious that it is an error to attempt to impose any rigorous theological structure on the poem: *The Ancient Mariner* is religious in a broad sense. It is about man's attempt to understand the mystery surrounding the human soul in a universe moved by forces and powers at once immanent and transcendent. [157] The Mariner shares the *Angst* and strictly limited insights achieved by most post-Romantic spiritual travellers, and his voyage is symbolic of the visionary terrors experienced by many who have, by circumstance or desire, been exposed to the world beyond the humanly imposed fictions of time and space. He returns from his experience as a deeply shaken man possessed of a profound and simple truth which he is charged to impart to others, although he himself, being neither philosopher nor prophet, lacks adequate means and understanding to give it more than a simple, albeit highly dramatic, account.

Not surprisingly the Mariner is sometimes considered by critics to be symbolic of the poet himself, especially the Romantic poet. Robert Penn Warren maintains that the Mariner's paradoxical stature of being at once blessed and accursed makes him a figure of the *poète maudit*; his dilemma, that is, is that of the Romantic poet himself who is both a healer and bringer of truth and beauty and at the same time an outsider, an outcast, a wanderer cut off from the society of men.¹⁶ But Warren's aesthetic interpretation goes well beyond a simple identification of the Mariner as poet, for he believes that *The Ancient Mariner* is a poem "about poetry itself and, in particular, about the poetic imagination. Warren's desire to find a single unified meaning in the poem leads him to posit the existence of two interwoven themes: the "primary" or moral theme of sacramental vision and the "One Life", which centres on the story of the Mariner's crime, punishment and reconciliation; and the "secondary" or aesthetic theme of Imagination, which reveals its presence

in the symbolic operation of the poem's major images (particularly the sun and the moon). Having declared that "the good events" in the poem "take place under the aegis of the moon, the bad events under that of the sun", Warren tries to establish that there is a coherent image-cluster (involving the moon, albatross, wind, Polar Spirit and water snakes) that symbolises the Imagination, and an antithetical image-cluster of sun, spectre-bark, and so on, that represents the Understanding or "mere reflective faculty" -- and that the Mariner's redemption (primary theme) is effected through Imagination (secondary theme), so that the moral and aesthetic themes are fused into a single experiential curve of meaning and intent.¹⁷ This interpretation, although it has influenced the views of many later critics, has satisfied very few of them. In the first place, Coleridge's moon-imagery in *The Ancient Mariner* and his other writings is by no [158] means always beneficent or always to be associated with the healing power of Imagination: the Mariner's shipmates in Part iii, for example, die beneath "the star-dogged Moon" (lines 210-15). And the sun in Coleridge's poetry can as easily be associated with Reason (the mind's highest power) as with the merely empirical Understanding.¹⁸ In other words, Warren's symbolic equations are too rigid and lean toward allegory; the poem's symbols need to be granted a freer, wider, less exact frame of reference. In the second place, as Humphry House points out, Warren's "'theme of the imagination' is something narrower and more technical than the poem can carry". *The Ancient Mariner* rather than being a poem "about" the creative imagination is, more properly, "part of the exploration . . . part of the experience which led Coleridge into his later theoretic statements . . . [and not] a symbolic adumbration of the theoretic statements themselves".¹⁹

Closely related to the theological concern with the question of free will *versus* determinism in the Mariner's universe is the problem of whether the poem reflects Coleridge's early infatuation with empiricism and philosophic necessity or his later devotion to transcendental metaphysics. S.F. Gingerich, who was the first critic to isolate the philosophic dimension of *The Ancient Mariner*, firmly established the direction of most early philosophic interpretations by finding in favour of the former. According to Gingerich, *The Ancient Mariner* is the "logical outcome" both philosophically and theologically of beliefs expressed in such poems as *Religious Musings* and *The Destiny of Nations*, which set out Coleridge's Unitarian and Necessitarian convictions of the mid-1790s. The Mariner, he argues, is a naive but engaging Unitarian who, not acting but consistently acted upon, is also a complete Necessitarian: "He has no will of his own; he is passive to the powers outside himself and the new law of life revealed to him; that is, he is a true Necessitarian".²⁰ Dorothy Waples, in another early philosophic interpretation, takes Gingerich's argument for empirical necessity a step further by attempting to demonstrate that *The Ancient Mariner* is a "complete exemplification" of David Hartley's mechanistic stimulus-response theory of association.²¹ Such views are reductive, of course, and make their cases largely by ignoring what they do not wish to see. And most recent philosophic interpretations come close to reversing the empirical, mechanistic and necessitarian emphases of Gingerich and Waples. John Beer, for example, stresses the visionary and transcendent nucleus of [159] Neoplatonic metaphysics that lies at the poem's heart: external events and physical

phenomena are symbolic of inner truths and metempirical realities. In *The Ancient Mariner*, as in Coleridge's other major poems, the material universe both masks and is the medium for apprehending the noumenal realms of spiritual and psychological reality. The supernatural is not separate from the natural, but the inner essence of it; and the Mariner's experiences, at once physical and metaphysical, constitute an imaginative exploration of the links between the material and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural. But Beer, unlike both Gingerich and Waples, is not dogmatic in his application of philosophic ideas to the poem; indeed, his central point is that *The Ancient Mariner* reflects an acute conflict in Coleridge's thinking between mechanical and transcendental explanations of the universe. By 1797-8, when the poem was composed, Coleridge had grown beyond his hard youthful commitment to empiricism, but he had not yet embraced, despite some serious reading in Neoplatonic works, the transcendental metaphysic that he was to develop out of his later immersion in Germany philosophy. *The Ancient Mariner*, then, belongs to a period of philosophic uncertainty, a kind of limbo between Hartley and Kant, when Coleridge was between philosophic creeds; and the poem is explorative and experimental, a probing with the help of the mystics and the Neoplatonists into transcendental speculation that anticipates Coleridge's later metaphysical commitments.²²

For a large number of twentieth-century readers biographical and psychological analyses have provided important keys to understanding the richness and emotional power of *The Ancient Mariner*. It has become virtually a critical axiom, for example, that the Mariner reflects a good deal of Coleridge himself and that there are striking parallels between the experiences of the poet and those of the old navigator. Precisely what these connections are, however, is another matter entirely. Hugh l'Anson Fausset finds the poem to be

an involuntary but inevitable projection into imagery of [Coleridge's] own inner discord. The Mariner's sin against Nature in shooting the Albatross imaged his own morbid divorce from the physical: and the poem was therefore moral in its essence, in its implicit recognition of creative values and of the spiritual death which dogs their frustration.²³

[160] Other readers propose other parallels: for D.W. Harding, the poem reflects a pathological depression resulting from Coleridge's repudiation of ordinary social ties; for Douglas Angus, it reveals the poet's abnormal need for love and sympathy; for Lynn Grow, it is a symbolic exculpation of Coleridge's failure to answer the question, "What is real?"; for Molly Lefebure, it is a proleptic vision of Coleridge's future struggles with the horrors of opium-addiction; and, for L.D. Berkoben, it reflects an inner spiritual struggle leading to apostasy and eventually to a return to religious orthodoxy.²⁴ About the only shared conviction in this plurality of opinions is the initial premise, common to all, that Coleridge unconsciously wrote a great deal of himself into his *Ancient Mariner*. And, as George Whalley has shown in an important essay, there *is* much in Coleridge's life and in his poem to support the conviction that the Mariner's spiritual and emotional experiences amount almost to a self-portrait of the poet. The "haunting quality" and vivid fascination of *The Ancient Mariner*, Whalley argues, grow from our intimate experience in the poem of the most intense personal suffering, perplexity, loneliness, longing, horror, fear. This experience brings

us, with Coleridge, to the fringes of madness and death, and carries us to that nightmare land that Coleridge inhabited, the realm of Life-in-Death . . .

. Whether or not he recognised this process at the time, Coleridge enshrined in *The Ancient Mariner* the quintessence of himself, of his suffering and dread, his sense of sin, his remorse, his powerlessness.²⁵

The Mariner, whose passivity and mesmeric eye are salient features of Coleridge himself, mirrors his maker's existential anxieties and profound sense of "aloneness". During his time on Malta (1804-6), when his hopeless addiction to opium exacerbated his neuroses almost beyond bearing, Coleridge realised vividly his kinship with the Mariner, and Coleridge's consciousness of this connection may be traced in the revisions of 1817 and, especially, in the famous "Moon gloss", where the note of personal allegory, of pain and despair and utter isolation, comes closest to the surface. As composed in 1798 "The Ancient Mariner was

both an unconscious projection of Coleridge's early sufferings and a vivid prophecy of the sufferings that were to follow. The [161] poem was probably not originally intended to be a personal allegory: but that is what, in Coleridge's eyes, it became later as the prophecy was slowly, inexorably, and lingeringly fulfilled.²⁶

Generally attempts to carry parallels between the experiences of the poet and those of his poem further than a recognition of broad similarities are strained and unconvincing. It has been suggested, for example, that Coleridge presents himself as the listening Wedding-Guest (surely an unnatural posture for a compulsive talker such as Coleridge), that the Hermit who "singeth loud his godly hymns / That he makes in the wood" represents Wordsworth, and that Life-in-Death is to be identified as Mrs Coleridge, with whom the poet was no longer in love because he had fallen in love with someone else (probably Dorothy Wordsworth!).²⁷ Ingenious speculation of this sort, with its potential for enthusiastically espoused absurdity, has also left its mark on much of the Freudian criticism of the poem. Instead of remaining content with half-truths, the Freudians crave specific relationships and tend, therefore, to reduce complex symbols to simple (often biographical) correspondences. Kenneth Burke links the albatross with Sara Coleridge and the poet's marital troubles, cheerfully declares that the blessing of the water snakes symbolises Coleridge's capitulation to opium, and reads the Pilot's Boy (who goes crazy) as the fictive scapegoat for Coleridge's opium guilt.²⁸ Other Freudian analysts have found in the poem evidence of Coleridge's unresolved incestuous conflicts, or latent homosexuality, or sado-masochism, or exhibitionism, or rejection of genital sexuality, or Oedipal fantasies concerned with the father-son relationship.²⁹ Or something else to be traced back into Coleridge's overburdened psyche. The most useful of the Freudian interpretations is David Beres's carefully developed argument that *The Ancient Mariner* is Coleridge's unconscious attempt to resolve in art his feelings of hostility and guilt toward his mother -- but even Beres falls prey to over-precision, as when he asserts, for example, that the "silly buckets" which fill with dew (lines 297-9) "symbolize the mother's breasts, previously empty and cruel, now full and forgiving".³⁰

Although the critical approaches summarised above constitute the major lines of analysis, there are, of course, other interpretations of *The Ancient Mariner*. Maud Bodkin and Mark Littmann have proposed mythic readings,

exploring the poem in the light of Jung's archetypes of rebirth and initiation.³¹ A number of [162] readers have argued for the existence of a political dimension in the poem.³² Still others have discussed the function and significance of the frame story of the wedding and the role of the Wedding-Guest, analysing the ways in which the wedding-feast provides a framework of reality for the Mariner's strange tale of the supernatural and the manner in which the Wedding-Guest serves as a foil for the hypnotic Mariner and as a bridge for the reader into the Mariner's nightmare world.³³ And finally, despite the widespread (indeed, almost universal) conviction that *The Ancient Mariner* is a "symbolic" statement of some kind, whether religious or philosophic or psychological or political or whatever, there remain some few voices proclaiming, in the tradition of Charles Lamb and his nineteenth-century heirs, that the poem is not about anything: it is a work of pure imagination to be experienced but not plundered for meaning, a poem to be "understood" only when understanding is suspended and the rationalising powers of the mind are asleep.³⁴

What, then, can one say finally about *The Ancient Mariner*? The anti-symbolists are surely right in objecting to those rigid interpretations that use symbolism to explain away the poem; and, yet, one inevitably feels cheated by the anti-symbolists who counsel a flight from meaning, for the poem speaks to the head as well as to the heart. The answer, it seems clear, must lie in a middle course between the extremes. John Beer expresses the solution thus: The relationship between the energies of the inquiring mind that an intelligent reader brings to the poem and the poem's refusal to yield a single comprehensive interpretation enacts vividly the everlasting intercourse between the human mind, with its instinct to organise and harmonise, and the baffling powers of the universe about it.³⁵

Less theoretically, the same point is made by Father Barth:

There is room for precision in the articulation of symbol, as long as it does not claim to be all. There is room for indefiniteness, as long as it does not abdicate the search for meaning. The Nicene definition of the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father does not deny the ultimate mystery of the Trinity, nor does the confession of the mystery negate the validity of the definition. As in *The Ancient Mariner*, we articulate what we can, in faithfulness to the revelation (or the poem) set before us; the rest is mystery.³⁶

[163] Poetry, as Coleridge himself succinctly reminds us, "gives most pleasure when only generally and not perfectly understood" (*AP*, p. 5).

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Notes

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1. Epigraphs: (a) from Robert Southey's review of *Lyrical Ballads* in the *Critical Review*, Oct 1798: see *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (London, 1970), p. 53; (b) *AP*, p. 5. *
2. *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, p. 403. *
3. *Ibid.*, p. 53. Southey's public opinion was also his private opinion: "The ballad I think nonsense", he declared to C.W.W. Wynn in a letter of December 1798 -- *New Letters of Robert Southey*, ed. Kenneth Curry, 2 vols (New York and London, 1965) i 177. Coleridge, for his part, was stung by Southey's comments and long remembered them, citing phrases in 1809 and 1811 to illustrate his harsh treatment at the hands of the reviewers: see *CL*, iii 203, 316. *
4. In fairness to Wordsworth it should be said that his letter (which has not survived) appears largely to have been concerned not with what Lamb had said about *The Ancient Mariner* but what he had said about Wordsworth's poems in the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* -- although (Lamb declares) "Devil a hint did I give that it [i.e. the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*] had not pleased me" (*LL*, i 272). *
5. An anonymous review in the *Edinburgh Magazine*, Oct 1817, for example, begins with these words: "Every reader of modern poetry is acquainted of course with 'The Ancient Mariner' . . . which, when once read, can never afterwards be entirely forgotten" -- *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, p. 392. *
6. J.G. Lockhart in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Oct 1819: *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, p. 436. See also Richard Haven's useful essay, "The Ancient Mariner in the Nineteenth Century", *SIR*, 11 (1972) 360-74. *
7. G.H. Clarke, "Certain Symbols in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*", *Queen's Quarterly*, 40 (1933) 27-45; the quotation is from pp. 29-30. *
8. See, for example, Gertrude Garrigues, "Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*", *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 14 (1880) 327-38; A.W. Crawford, "On Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*", *MLN*, 34 (1919) 311-13; and Newton P. Stallknecht, "The Moral of the *Ancient Mariner*", *PMLA*, 47 (1932) 559-69. *
9. Robert Penn Warren, "A Poem of Pure Imagination: an Experiment in Reading", *Kenyon Review*, 8 (1946) 391-427; rev. and expanded in *Selected Essays of Robert Penn Warren* (New York, 1958) pp. 198-305. (All my references are to this latter version.) *

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10. Among the best of the symbolic religious interpretations are the following: Clarke (above, note 7); Warren, *Selected Essays* (preceding note); C.M. Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949; repr. New York, 1961) pp. 51-75; R.L. Brett, *Reason and Imagination: A Study of Form and Meaning in Four Poems* (Oxford, 1960; repr. 1968) pp. 78-107; and J.W.R. Purser, "Interpretation of *The Ancient Mariner*", *RES*, 8 (1957) 249-56. *
11. Warren, *Selected Essays* (above, note 9), pp. 227-33; the quotation is from pp. 232-3. The view that "the great constitutive idea" of *The Ancient Mariner* is "the concept of the fall and of man's damaged nature" has been argued by a number of critics: e.g. William Walsh, *Coleridge: The Work and the Relevance* (London, 1967; New York, 1973) pp. 118-21. See also W.H. Auden, *The Enchafèd Flood, or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (Charlottesville, Va, 1950; repr. New York, 1967) pp. 72-3: "But for the Fall (the shooting of the Albatross), Adam (The Ancient Mariner) would never have consciously learned through suffering the meaning of Agapé, i.e., to

- love one's neighbour as oneself without comparisons or greed (the blessing of the snakes), so that the Ancient Mariner might well say in the end, *O felix culpa*." *
12. Adam's transgression, however, while perhaps unmotivated, is by no means a sin committed (like the Mariner's) in ignorance. Adam was specifically interdicted the eating of the apple; the hapless Mariner received no such warning about shooting birds. *
 13. J.A. Stuart, "The Augustinian 'Cause of Action' in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*", *Harvard Theological Review*, 60 (1967) 177-211. See also George Bellis, "The Fixed Crime of *The Ancient Mariner*", *EIC*, 24 (1974) 243-60. *
 14. Edward Bostetter, "The Nightmare World of *The Ancient Mariner*", *SIR*, i (1962) 241-54; rev. in Bostetter's *The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron* (Seattle and London, 1963; rev. edn, 1965) pp. 108-18; the quotation is from p. 115. *
 15. James D. Boulger, "Christian Skepticism in *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*", in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. F.W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York, 1965) pp. 439-52; the quotations are from pp. 451 and 444. *
 16. Warren, *Selected Essays* (above, note 9), pp. 257-60. Although many critics would agree that the Mariner symbolises the figure of a poet, not everyone accepts Warren's case for his being a *poète maudit*: Boulger, for example, argues that "he is a parable of the creative poet, of course, working in the modern rationalistic world, but he is not *maudit*, but rather a necessarily suffering being" (in *From Sensibility to Romanticism* [above, note 15], p. 450). *
 17. Warren, *Selected Essays* (above, note 9), pp. 233-50. *
 18. See, for example, John Beer's analysis of Coleridge's sun and moon imagery in *Coleridge the Visionary* (London, 1959; repr. 1970) pp. 158-74 *passim*. *
 19. Humphry House, *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures 1951-52* (London, 1953; repr. 1969) pp. 110-13. *
 20. S.F. Gingerich, "From Necessity to Transcendentalism in Coleridge", *PMLA*, 35 (1920) 1-59; the quotation is from p. 14. *
 21. Dorothy Waples, "David Hartley in *The Ancient Mariner*", *JEGP*, 35 [266] (1936) 337-51. See also G.O. Carey, "Ethics in *The Mariner*", *English Record*, 17 (1966) 18-20. *
 22. See Beer, *Coleridge the Visionary* (above, note 18), pp. 133-74, and his chapter on *The Ancient Mariner* ("An Exploring Fiction") in *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* (London, 1977) pp. 147-84. Also helpful is Adair *The Waking Dream* (cf. [Composition, n. 22](#)) esp. pp. 44-55. Other examinations of the relationship between empiricism and transcendentalism in the poem include the following: Irene Chayes, "A Coleridgean Reading of *The Ancient Mariner*", *SIR*, 4 (1965) 81-103; Ralph Freedman, "Eyesight and Vision: Forms of the Imagination in Coleridge and Novalis", in *The Rarer Action: Essays in Honor of Francis Fergusson*, ed. A. Cheuse and R. Koffler (New Brunswick, N.J., 1970), pp. 202-17; and George Bellis, "The Fixed Crime of *The Ancient Mariner*", *EIC*, 24 (1974) 243-60. *
 23. Hugh l'Anson Fausset, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, 1926; repr. 1972) p. 166. *
 24. D.W. Harding, "The Theme of *The Ancient Mariner*", *Scrutiny*, 9 (1941) 334-42; Douglas Angus, "The Theme of Love and Guilt in Coleridge's Three Major Poems", *JEGP*, 59 (1960) 655-68; Lynn M. Grow, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: Multiple Veils of Illusion", *Notre Dame English Journal*, 9 (1973) 23-30; Lefebure, *Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium* (London, 1974; repr. 1977), pp. 259-66;

L.D. Berkoben, *Coleridge's Decline as a Poet* (Paris and The Hague, 1975) pp. 73-92.

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25. George Whalley, "The Mariner and the Albatross", *UTQ*, 16 (1947) 381-98. Reprinted in *Coleridge: The Ancient Mariner and Other Poems*, ed. A.R. Jones and W. Tydeman (London, 1973) pp. 160-83; the quotation is from pp. 161-2. *
26. *Ibid.*, p. 177. For other important discussions of the Mariner's and Coleridge's shared experience of alienation and depression, see the following: A.M. Buchan, "The Sad Wisdom of the Mariner", *SIP*, 61 (1964) 669-88; Adair, *The Waking Dream* (cf. [Composition, n. 22](#)), pp. 39-94; and Richard Haven, *Patterns of Consciousness: An Essay on Coleridge* (Amherst, Mass., 1969) pp. 18-42. *
27. H. Parsons, "Coleridge as 'The Wedding Guest' in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*", *N&Q*, 195 (1950) 251-2; Hoxie N. Fairchild, *Religious Trends in English Poetry*, 6 vols (New York, 1949; repr. 1956) iii 294; Mendilow (cf. [Ballad, n. 1](#)) 48-62. *
28. Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Baton Rouge, La, 1941; 2nd edn, 1967) pp. 71-3, 287-8. *
29. For a broad sample of Freudian readings, see the following: Beverly Fields, *Reality's Dark Dream: Dejection in Coleridge* (Kent, Ohio, 1968) pp. 84-91; H.S. Visweswariah, "Motive-finding in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*", *Literary Criterion* (Mysore), 8 (1969) 27-38; M.J. Lupton, "The *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: the Agony of Thirst", *American Imago*, 27 (1970) 140-59; Leon Waldoff, "The Quest for Father and Identity in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*", *Psychoanalytic Review*, 58 (1971) 439-53; and Norman Fruman, *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (New York, 1971; London, 1972) pp. 403-12. *
30. David Beres, "A Dream, a Vision, and a Poem: a Psycho-Analytic Study of the Origins of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*", *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, 32 (1951) 97-116; the quotation is from p. 109. *

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31. Maud Bodkin, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry: Psychological Studies of Imagination* (Oxford, 1934; repr. New York, 1958) pp. 25-58; and Mark Littmann, "The Ancient Mariner and Initiation Rites", *Papers on Language and Literature*, 4 (1968) 370-89. *
32. The most attractive argument for a political undercurrent in the poem is John Beer's suggestion that the Mariner's anguish and subsequent restoration through blessing the water snakes reflects the process of political disillusionment through which young idealists such as Coleridge and Wordsworth passed when the French Revolution soured into the Reign of Terror and necessitated their effort to rediscover an idealistic vision in the reinterpretation of Nature rather than in the world of political events: see *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* (London, 1977) pp. 149-51, 161-4, 175.
Other critics have seen reflected in the poem Coleridge's strong opposition to the slave-trade and his objections to exploitative colonial expansion: see Malcolm Ware, "Coleridge's 'Spectre-bark': a Slave Ship?", *PQ*, 40 (1961) 589-93; William Empson, "The Ancient Mariner", *Critical Quarterly*, 6 (1964) 298-319 -- a highly idiosyncratic and question-begging essay; and J.R. Ebbatson, "Coleridge's Mariner and the Rights of Man", *SIR*, 11 (1972) 171-206. *
33. See, for example, House, *Coleridge* (above, note 19), p. 96; Ward Pafford, "Coleridge's Wedding-Guest", *SIP*, 60 (1963) 618-26; Boulger, in *From Sensibility to Romanticism* (above, note 15), esp. pp. 446-50; M.L. D'Avanzo, "Coleridge's Wedding-Guest and Marriage-Feast: the Biblical Context", *University of Windsor Review*, 8 (1972) 62-6; and Modiano (cf. [Composition, n. 31](#)), 40-61. *

34. See, for example, E.E. Stoll, "Symbolism in Coleridge", *PMLA*, 63 (1948) 214-33; Lionel Stevenson (cf. [Ballad, n. 1](#)), esp. pp. 34-40; I.A. Richards, Introduction to *The Portable Coleridge* (New York, 1950; repr. Harmondsworth, 1977) p. 34; and Watson, *Coleridge the Poet* (London, 1966), esp. pp. 94-100. [*](#)
35. Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* (above, note 32), p. 180. [*](#)
36. Barth, *The Symbolic Imagination* ([Composition, n. 26](#)), p. 99. [*](#)



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