

A Symbolic Reading of the Mariner's Voyage in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner *

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قراءة رمزية لرحلة البحار في قصيدة «البحار القديم»

ملخص:

إن قصيدة "البحار القديم"، والتي هي من صنف الأغاني الشعبية، تختلف عن النمط التقليدي لأن تركيزها ليس على الأحداث وإنما على الرموز التي في كنه تلك الأحداث. إنها تصف رحلة بحرية، ولكن هذه الرحلة هي في داخل النفس الشعاعية وما فيها من إمكانات. هذه النفس هي التي أخذت بمجامع البحار بعد سلسلة من التحولات الداخلية، وإن قطبي التجاذب في داخلها هو ما بين نزعتها الإبداعية من جهة وما اعتادت عليه في حياتها من ألفة من جهة أخرى. لقد استخدم كوليرج أنماطاً من الصور الشعرية المناسبة لتلك الرحلة. إن الشاعر يعاني من أزمة رُوحية عميقة تستلزم استخدام لغة رمزية للتعبير عنها، وبدون اللجوء إلى القراءة الرمزية فإن كثيراً من الأحداث المهمة ستبدو غريبة وغير منطقية. إن بعض الرموز المستخدمة هي تقليدية، وبعضها خاصة، أي من إبداع كوليرج. وبالرغم من التنوع الكبير في الصور الشعرية والرموز إلا أنها جميعاً مُندمجة في كيان عضوي متناسق.

Abstract:

The Ancient Mariner is unlike other conventional ballads because its focus is not an event but rather the symbolism that derives from an event. It describes a voyage into the interior spaces of the poetic self, whose potentialities are limitless. The poetic self emerges after the Mariner undergoes a process of transformation. The tension in the poem exists between the familiar self and the imaginative, creative self. Coleridge uses various images that correspond to the purpose of the voyage. The poet suffers from a deep spiritual crisis that demands the use of a symbolic language. The use of such language, in turn, requires a symbolic reading of the poem to capture the significance of its events. Otherwise, important events simply appear to be strange, inconsistent, or incoherent. The symbols that are used in the poem are both traditional and personal, in the sense of being unique to Coleridge. Despite the range of images and symbols that are used in the poem, they are merged into a consistent whole.

Keywords: Familiarity, Imagination, Mariner, Spiritual, Symbolic

1. Introduction:

The Mariner's Character, the Wedding Guest, and the Start of the Voyage:

Part One of the poem presents a wedding party with its bride and bridegroom, musical band, and guests, as well as a vivid description of the departure of the ship and the course it takes. Taken together, all of these elements produce the impression that the voyage has actually been undertaken. In other words, these descriptions make the symbolic voyage concrete and reveal the Mariner's pangs of loneliness that are manifested in the events that follow.

Because of his special physical features, such as his "glittering eye" (p. 3, l. 187)⁽¹⁾, the Mariner is easily singled out. The "glittering eye" may also be understood to allude to the Mariner's possession of special spiritual powers and intelligence. He has the power to mesmerize others, but this is a case of holy mesmerization, which does not have an adverse impact on the person who comes under his spell. During the course of the voyage, the Mariner is active three times. First, he kills the Albatross, "With my cross-bow / I shot the ALBATROSS" (l. 189, pp. 81-82). Second, he bites his arm and cries, "A Sail! a sail!" (l. 192, p. 161) and "Gramercy!" (l. 193, p. 164). Third, he blesses the water-snakes "unaware" (l. 198, p. 287). Coleridge's own ability to render his listeners spell-bound can easily be compared with the Mariner's magical power; based on this power, one can assume that the Mariner serves as a reflection of Coleridge, the poet. This correspondence is further strengthened by the events that follow. In events such as trances, dreams, and visions, the Mariner's characteristics resemble those of a poet. Warren says that the Mariner is the "cursed poet" of the late Romantics. He reaches this conclusion from an analysis of the duality of the moon, the sun, and the Polar Spirit (House, 1953, p. 107). Watson (1970) suspects "that the character of the Ancient Mariner had something of facetious self-portraiture in it, and perhaps it had. Mr. Gillman, Coleridge's first biographer, drew the

(1) Hereafter, pages or page and line numbers in parentheses are used to refer to quotations from Coleridge, E. H. (ed.). (1967). Coleridge: Poetical Work. London: Oxford University Press.

analogy, and it may have been Coleridge's own" (p. 10). Gillman (1838) says Coleridge "delighted many of the strangers he met in his saunterings through the cloister [of Christ's Hospital], arrested and riveted the attention of the passer-by whom, like his 'Ancient Mariner[,] he held by a spell" (p. 38).

In contrast, the Mariner's passivity may also reflect Coleridge's personal life and his habit of procrastination. The Mariner's passivity reaches its culmination when he returns to his homeland and requests that the priest shrive him. He surrenders to the priest and thus allows the priest's ascendant self to dominate his passive self. Because the Mariner chooses a wandering life as a consequence of his cosmic punishment, his passivity reaches a new dimension. He is no longer an active mariner sharing a corporate life on board the ship but rather a lonely figure who is prey to the different forces that surround him. The only active assertion of his will takes place when he stops a passer-by to tell his story. However, once the story is told, his passivity returns. In a sense, his being subjected to a debilitating passivity is a form of cosmic punishment.

The Mariner passes on "like night, from land to land," and he knows "the man that must hear" him, and to him he tells his tale (p. 208, ll. 286, 589-90). The Wedding-Guest is selected from the rest of the party by the Mariner himself, who "holds him with his glittering eye" (p. 187, l. 13). The Wedding-Guest is the one who can understand the Mariner's difficulties. Rudra (1991) accurately notes that, if we consider the poem "as a parable of creation, the Wedding-Guest is the ideal reader of the poem" (p. 96). The Wedding-Guest sees through the Mariner's eyes, and his voice appears at highly critical moments, which might be a device that Coleridge employs to ease tension and support his use of symbolic events. In his depiction of the Wedding-Guest as an inspired person, Coleridge might have been influenced by a character in Plato's *Ion* (1984), who says, "So the Muse not only inspires people herself, but through these inspired ones, others are inspired and dangle on a string" (p. 18). The presence of the Wedding-Guest is necessary for the Mariner to release his tensions and to realize himself. Lacan (1986) observes, "If the Other [to whom we talk and communicate] is taken away [,] man cannot sustain the position of Narcissus" (MacCannell, p. 61). The Mariner's demand for the presence of the Wedding-Guest is the demand of his inner spiritual desires. MacCannell (1986) says that the demand for the "Other" is in fact the inverted demand for the ego (pp. 82-83).

As with most sea journeys, the voyage begins with the Mariner and the crew on board the ship. The ship is driven by the wind towards the south, until

it reaches the land of mist and snow. Lowes (1955) notes that, in medieval terminology, travelling to the south meant “to bathe in fiery floods or to reside in thrilling regions of thick-ribbed ice” (p. 108). The south is the land of cold, which reflects the coldness of familiarity and of a routine life. Rudra (1991) says, “Taken symbolically, the ice indicates frigidity of the soul--a state of spiritual apathy” (p. 95). In Stokes’ opinion (2011), “The Ice was here, the Ice was there, / The Ice was all around” (189, ll. 59-60) indicates that the ship has reached a region where its orientation is unclear. Danger is imminent as the ice “cracked and growled, and roared and howled, / Like noises in a swound!” (p. 189, ll. 61-62). At these moments of danger, an Albatross appears as if it were “a Christian soul,” and the crew “hailed it” (p. 198, ll. 65-66). The presence of the Albatross plays an important structural role in the poem because it successfully unites the diverse supernatural and natural elements in addition to its role in the natural and logical sequence of events. After the appearance of the Albatross, the ship sails smoothly for nine days, which bears a resemblance to the ordinary and easy-going life of the ordinary men exemplified by the crew.

2. Killing the Albatross and Its Consequences before the Appreciation of the Water-Snakes:

The Mariner kills the Albatross with a cross-bow, which is an ancient weapon that gives the poem a touch of medievalism. The killing of the Albatross may indicate the severing of the bonds of superstition and familiar life so that the Mariner is free to establish a bond with the world of spirituality. In the Mariner’s altered state of spirituality, the savior does not appear as an outsider like the Albatross but as a presence within. The Mariner is unlike the rest of the crew, whose superstitious beliefs associate the Albatross with a good omen. They also take the bird to be a symbol of redemption, as Jesus is believed to be the Savior. The killing marks the beginning of the transitional period that the Mariner experiences, a passage from his familiar life to a higher state of being. It is a form of revival of “the reality of the self” (Islam, 1987, p. 69). Swanepoel (2010) notes, “The analyses show how Coleridge confronts readers with images built on underlying antitheses, specifically familiarity and unfamiliarity.” The killing of the Albatross seems to be inevitable, just as Adam’s eating from the tree of knowledge was inevitable. It is an act that leads to an attainment of knowledge and the start of a new life. According to Christian belief, Christ’s crucifixion and blood were necessary for the redemption of humanity. The same is true in regard to the killing of the Albatross, which must occur for the Mariner to reach a higher level of self-realization. The Mariner’s face displays a seriousness that proves that

the killing was not done for amusement or without purpose. After killing the Albatross, the Mariner's body experiences a strange spiritual commotion (p. 189, ll. 79-80)

An understanding of the existential status of the Albatross and an interpretation of its killing is essential to decipher some of the hidden and profound meanings of the poem and its symbolism. Readers are aware that interpretations differ in regard to what the Albatross represents and what is gained by killing it. A number of questions must be taken into consideration to fully address this issue. Is the Albatross a symbol? Is the killing committed without a purpose? Is the bird a good omen?

The Albatross is an important element of the symbolic voyage and undoubtedly is not an ordinary bird but rather embodies profound and important meanings. For example, what is the reason for keeping the dead bird on board for nine days before the crew hangs it around the Mariner's neck? Although the Albatross is hung around the Mariner's neck for nine days in extremely hot weather, the corpse of the Albatross remains unchanged and does not decay at all. This phenomenon undoubtedly indicates that the bird is not an ordinary bird but a symbolic bird that represents aspects of the Mariner's and the crew's spirituality, as exhibited by the Albatross's dependence upon the food that they had offered to it. Especially during earlier eras, human belief systems have often included ominous symbolic forms, and associating this type of symbol with something that serves a purpose or suits a need is also very common to the human species. In the case of *The Ancient Mariner*, the crew perceives that the Albatross is such a symbol and acts accordingly.

The Mariner tries to discard established beliefs and superstitions to achieve a new form of belief that is guided by imagination. The course of the action and the events of the poem reveal that the Mariner seeks repentance through deeds rather than words. For him, killing the Albatross is essential for starting a new life. Coleridge might have shrouded his poem in many religious ideas and beliefs to show that in the evolution of a system of beliefs, faith, and superstition eventually overlap and that, although religion is important in human life, we also at times encounter many superstitions in the name of religion. In this regard, it should be remembered that when Coleridge composed *The Ancient Mariner*, he was a radical in many ways and had not been a believer in the Trinitarian form of Christianity since 1795. In March 1794, when he was still quite young, he wrote to his brother, "[M]y reason (or perhaps my reasonings) would not permit me to worship" (Griggs, 1956, Vol. 1, p. 69). "During the mid- to late 1790s," Coleridge was full of "uncertainty

and skepticism” about “the Christian idea of redemption” (Hillier, 2009). In any case, Coleridge did not appear to be tethered to any dogmatic belief or creed when he composed his poem; instead, he seemed to be looking inward for a poetic, rather than a religious, faith. When Coleridge was attending the university, he was a Unitarian, and he later became a preacher in Bridgewater and Taunton. After 1800, Coleridge again became a Trinitarian when (Abrams, 1968) “he was a broken man, an inveterate drug addict estranged from his wife, suffering from agonies of remorse, and subject to terrifying nightmares of guilt and despair” (pp. 210-11).

Critics have offered a number of interpretations regarding what the Albatross symbolizes and the role that it plays in the poem. Most of these interpretations fail to discern any coherent logic or provide a comprehensive view that bears out the complexities one encounters in reading the poem. I have visited Internet sites and read many readers’ comments about the killing of the Albatross and its symbolic implications. Most comments compare the killing of the Albatross to Christ’s death because the poem describes the Albatross as “a Christian soul;” thus, readers believe that there is an indisputable connection between Christ and the Albatross that suggests a redeeming, Christ-like force. A number of major critics, such as Knight (1968, pp. 84-85), have made the same claim. In my view, this understanding of the matter is untenable because the Mariner’s real freedom begins when the Albatross sinks into the sea and vanishes from the scene altogether. In comparison, the situation with Christ is very different because freedom is given to man after Christ’s resurrection and Christ does not vanish from view like the Albatross did. In contrast to the above view, there are also contemporary (Fry, 2012) “postcolonial reading[s] or ... trauma theory reading[s]” of the poem and its symbols (p. 2).

Charpentier (1929) introduces external elements into the issue by identifying the Albatross as a real man. He claims that, “by slaying the albatross, the Mariner must have done more than commit an act of cruelty, he must have been guilty of some real crime, that is to say, he must have slain a man in the disguise of the innocent bird, according to Brahminic belief in the transmigration of souls, since he had to undergo so awful a penalty” (p. 136). However, Charpentier extends his point beyond the frame of reference that is established by the poem because there is no reference to metempsychosis or the transmigration of the souls in the poem; these ideas are alien to the context of the poem.

One might disagree with critics such as Yarlott (1967, p. 156) and Warren (House, 1953, p. 97), who seek to find a parallel between the killing of the

Albatross and the fall of Adam, because they do not fully relate these events. They concede that whereas Adam was strongly motivated to seek knowledge, which led to his fall, the Mariner was not motivated by a similar strong drive in killing the Albatross, and the killing of the Albatross should have been motivated for the parallel to be successful. The killing of the bird symbolizes the Mariner's fall, which is motivated by his desire to preserve what is precious within himself, that is, his desire to assert himself as a person with special powers. Such an assertion requires a special bond with nature, which House (1953, p. 106) and Hough (1963, p. 57) clearly deny when they say that the Mariner tries to dissociate himself from nature. According to House, the Mariner's killing of the Albatross is not only a crime that is "committed against the other, natural and spiritual, order of the world, but also a crime against creative imagination" (p. 106). There is a great deal to disagree with in this interpretation because the events of the poem indicate that the Mariner seeks a higher form of a bond with nature. Moreover, there is no real bond between the crew and the Albatross because the bird is not loved due to deep sympathy for it but rather because it is associated with a good omen. The real bond is between "the One Life within us and abroad / Which meets all motion and becomes its soul" (p. 101, ll. 26-27). Cassirer (1975) may be closer to the truth when he argues that no one can consider cutting off relations and bonds with nature (p. 100).

Critics such as House (1953) and Knight (1968, p. 85) believe that the killing of the Albatross is without purpose. House claims that the killing of the Albatross "is unmotivated and wanton." One wonders about the "unexplained act of the shooting." House adds that although the motivation for the killing of the Albatross is left unexplained, the marginal glosses indicate that the killing "was a ghastly violation of a great sanctity, at least as bad as a murder" (pp. 95-97). The school of thought that believes that the killing of the bird is purposeless seems to be supported by Coleridge's marginal glosses, in which the killing is described as a type of inhospitality. It would have been better if Coleridge had not included the glosses because they do not improve one's understanding of the poem but instead confuse and curb the reader's imagination because (McGann, 1981) "to this day most readers take to represent at least one level of Coleridge's own interpretation of his poem" (p. 38). Although the purposes of the killing of the bird and the blessing of the water-snakes are not clear in the poem, the two acts are not irrational or purposeless because they are crucial to the development of the Mariner's self. The two acts lead the Mariner to undertake actions that cause his transformation. They can be described as mysterious because they are the

sources of the Mariner's mysterious spiritual transformation. Rostvig's claim (1967) that the killing is "trivial" (p. 69) and Prickett's belief (1970) that it is "arbitrary and meaningless" (p. 139) are untenable due to the consequences produced by the killing and the seriousness with which the Mariner faces up to those consequences.

Warren (House, 1953, p. 106) and Whalley (1947, p. 44), among others, claim that the Albatross is a symbol of Coleridge's creative imagination and that its killing disrupts the harmonious bond between the poet and nature, which eventually diminishes the poet's creative power. Although there is some merit to this line of reasoning, it falls short of accepting the clear fact that the Mariner's spirituality is revived and strengthened after the killing of the bird rather than before it. There is no evidence in the poem of an association between the bird and the Mariner's spirituality before the act of killing. While the Albatross is still alive, the crew and the Mariner have similar reactions towards the various element of nature, and nature does not bestow anything special upon any of them. After the killing of the bird, the Mariner is singled out as the only person who is won by "Life-in-Death," followed by a communion with the elements of nature. After the killing of the bird and what follows, the Mariner becomes endowed with a "secondary," creative imagination that is higher than the "primary," ordinary, everyday imagination because it enables the poet to discover new meanings in what he sees and hears. Thus, a new and more refined world is born from the realm of crude familiarity.

The crew represents the majority, who are spiritually blind, because they adhere to the surface-level meanings of events and change their minds for superficial reasons. The members of the crew lack inner joy because they are satisfied solely with living in a familiar world and pursuing a routine life. Because the members of the crew belong to the world of primary imagination, they naturally cannot transcend ordinary human limitation; accordingly, they are often superstitious. Based on their superstitious beliefs, they associate the bird with good luck. When the Mariner kills the bird, they regret the killing and hold the Mariner responsible. The crew thus laments, "Ah, Wretch! said they, the bird to slay, / That made the breeze to blow!" (p. 190, ll. 95-96). After the disappearance of fog and mist, the crew accepts the killing of the bird because it brings fog and mist, "'Twas right said they, such bird to slay, / That bring the fog and mist" (p. 190, ll. 101-02). As Davidson (1990) argues, it is true that "the sailors are superstitious, entrapped in a slavish adherence to empirical signs," and are in need of a more "sacramental understanding of nature" (p. 54). However, when trouble recurs, that is, when the breeze stops and "the

sails dropt down” (p. 190, l. 107), the crew again begins to look angrily at the Mariner (p. 191, ll. 139-40), and, eventually, “they hang the dead sea-bird round” the Mariner’s neck before they die (p. 192, [Coleridge’s glosses]). These passages indicate that the crew wanders within the realm of superstition and the primary imagination. They are unable to think consistently and fail to reach the higher world of spirituality. In other words, they suffer from a congenital want of creativity and thus lack a sympathetic and integrative attitude toward nature. These limitations render the crew unfit for a spiritual voyage. In contrast, the Mariner is spiritually equipped to penetrate deep into the spirit of nature. As the Mariner’s spiritual voyage progresses, all natural forces and elements, including the wind, are transposed to a higher level in which they begin to symbolize the Mariner’s creative imagination. When the wind blows, it indicates that the secondary imagination in the Mariner is operating. The difference between the two levels of the wind is easily seen by comparing the following lines: “He struck with his overtaking wings, / And chased us south along,” (p. 188, ll. 42-43) and “Like a meadow-gale of spring -- / It mingled strangely with my fears, / Yet it felt like a welcoming” (p. 204, ll. 457-59).

The ship stops because there is no wind. Because the voyage is symbolic, the ship is also elevated to a higher level and requires another type of wind. The stillness of the ship and the prevailing silence both inside and outside the ship give the reader the impression of imminent catastrophe. The heat of the sun marks the transitional period between the primary imagination and the secondary imagination experienced by the Mariner. The sun is described as “Nor dim nor red, like God’s own head, / The glorious Sun uprist” (p. 190, ll. 97-98). In this simile, Coleridge confronts his readers with something that cannot be seen: “God’s own head,” by relying on known information, “The glorious Sun.” Other similes are used, such as the Mariner’s comparison of the “water” to “a witch’s oils” (p. 191, ll. 129-30) and the image of the “elfish light” that “Fell off in hoary flakes” (p. 198, ll. 275-78). Ashton (1996) notes that this type of simile draws the experience nearer while simultaneously emphasizing the rarity of the experience (p. 127). Perhaps the majority of critics do not attempt to interpret the above two lines because they find it difficult to understand them. Lowes (1955) claims that Coleridge’s took the two lines from other writers but that Coleridge’s skill transformed them into a “more eloquent” passage (p. 144). House (1953) provides an explanation that has satisfied many critics and readers. He claims that the two lines mean, “Either (a) That God’s head is dim and red, but the glorious sun uprose unlike it. Or (b) that the glorious sun rose like God’s head which is not dim

or red.” House considers (b) to be “more likely” (p. 99). In keeping with the atmosphere of the poem, in these two lines, Coleridge asks his readers to consider the analogy between the sun, which represents familiar nature, and God’s head, which the spirit is residing in the elements of nature. In making this connection, one is reminded that most individuals are only endowed with a primary imagination and thus are unable to discern a miraculous influence in even the most extraordinary things. Most individuals are similar to the crew, who are unable to penetrate deeply into the spirit of nature, although a few, like the Mariner, are able to see life within nature’s elements, which Coleridge referred to in *The Eolian Harp* as the “one Life within us and abroad” (p. 101, l. 26)

There is nothing surrounding the ship but the vast, lifeless sea with its salt water and the sky with its dry, hot sun. This situation of drought and lifelessness, symbolizing familiarity, which Coleridge termed the “*natura naturata*” (“*On Poesy or Art*,” 1927, p. 257), is unable to provide any form of spirituality to the Mariner and the crew because only the primary imagination is at play in them at that time. Thus, everything is fixed and monotonous:

Day after day, day after day,

We stuck, nor breath nor motion;

As idle as a painted ship

Upon a painted ocean. (pp. 190-91, ll. 115-18)

Nature can only be turned and transformed into “*natura Naturans*” (“*On Poesy or Art*,” 1927, p. 257), or lively nature, through the spiritual power of the observer. The vastness of the sea creates the impression that the Mariner is cast into a spaceless realm that can be compared to the spacelessness of the poet’s imagination; it also mirrors infinite nature and the limitless experiences and potentialities awaiting the individual endowed with a creative imagination. The lifelessness of the ocean reflects the dearth of imagination in both the crew and the Mariner, which cannot be overcome without the revival of the fountain of the inner spirituality that enables the individual to experience the spirit in nature. The image of the lifelessness surrounding the Mariner and the crew is beautifully captured in the following lines:

Water, water, every where,

And all the boards did shrink;

Water, water, every where,

Nor any drop to drink. (p. 191, ll. 121-22)

The water surrounding the crew and the Mariner appears lifeless because the spiritual transformation that facilitates the perception of the presence of life in nature is not yet ripe in either the Mariner or the crew. The image intensifies the spiritual drought. Water is a vital element in nature, yet the Mariner cannot drink it, symbolizing the spiritual separation between Nature and the romantic poet who is unable to be a poet without communion with Nature. For a romantic poet, being deprived of communion with Nature is a severe punishment.

One of the forces punishing the Mariner and crew is the Polar Spirit that "plagued" them and "followed" the ship onto "Nine fathom deep / From the land of mist and snow" (p. 191, ll. 132-34). The Polar Spirit is an aspect of what Coleridge terms the "Spirit" that molds and creates and that moves "on the darkness of the Waters!" It is "Like that great Spirit, who with plastic Sweep / Mov'd on the darkness of the formless Deep!" (Griggs, 1956, Vol. 1, pp. 123, 136). Prima facie, although the Polar Spirit and the angelic troop seem to be terrifying, in reality, they are benign. They chastise the Mariner's soul to purify it. Lowes (1955) states that the angelic power in *The Ancient Mariner* is "not demon, with its Judeo-Christian import of an unclean, evil, or malignant spirit" (p. 213). In addition to this punishment, the drought is intensified, and both the crew and the Mariner experience an unbearable thirst: "We could not speak, no more than if / We had been choked with soot. (p. 191, ll. 137-38). Subsequent events indicate that the agonizing thirst is spiritual and can only be quenched from the fountain within. From a spiritual point of view, the crew is fated to die because the crew members are not endowed with the inner joy that would enable them to continue the voyage. The excruciating agony of the spiritual transformation that the crew undergoes compels them to blame the Mariner for killing the Albatross, which they believe caused their present disaster. Thus, the crew, "Instead of" hanging "the cross," hang the Albatross around the Mariner's neck (p. 191, pp. 141-52). Fraser (1981) notes that the act of hanging the Albatross is highly suggestive and indicates the intense spiritual upheaval suffered by the crew. Fraser adds that "the albatross around the mariner's neck is an emblem of an inner state" (p. 206). The act "is the most profoundly symbolic in the poem. And it may well have been tinged for Coleridge with a deeper symbolism still" (Lowes, 1955, p. 237). Although the poem seems to be deeply religious due to the image of hanging the Albatross around the Mariner's neck like a cross, phrases such as the "Polar Spirit,"

which have nothing to do with Christianity, seem to be related to paganism and clearly suggests that the idea of religion extends beyond institutional Christianity.

The Mariner encounters a strange sight on the horizon: "I beheld / A something in the sky" (p. 192, ll. 147-48). Eventually, this "something" appears to be a skeleton ship with two mates, "Death" and "Life-in-Death." The crew hails it like the Albatross, but as it approaches, the Mariner and the crew realize that it is not a ship of hope. The structure of the approaching ship is strange because its sails are "Like restless gossameres" (p. 193, l. 184). Furthermore, the sun appears behind the bars of the ship, "Are those her ribs through which the Sun / Did peer, as through a grate?" (p. 193, ll. 185-86). Coleridge often uses the images of "bars" and "imprisonment" in his poetry, perhaps based on subconscious memories of the time when he lived in Christ's Hospital School behind iron gates and walls. Yarlott (1967) claims that the image of the sun behind the bars "is the most terrible of all Coleridge's 'prisons'" (p. 162). For Wordsworth, the source of the "skeleton ship with figures in it" was Cruikshank's dream of "a person suffering from a dire curse for the commission of some crime" (Bowra, 1988, p. 54). The extraordinary spectacle of the skeleton ship, which introduces an element of suspense as well as serving as a vital development in the story, is another device that Coleridge employs to fuse the supernatural and the elements of the natural world.

After the eerie figures of "Death" and "Life-in-Death" cast the dice, the stasis that had been maintained for so long is broken. The crew members are won by "Death" and die, while the Mariner is claimed by "Life-in-Death" and remains alive. The death of the crew seems to be more than physical; it is also spiritual because they are unable to comprehend the spirit underlying the surface of familiar nature. The crew dies under the light of the moon. The moon symbolizes the imagination, and the crew's death represents the inability to revive their spirituality. In other words, the crew is unable to survive spiritually, and this inability is manifested in their physical death because they are not endowed with the innate power of creative imagination.

The game of dice played by "Death" and "Life-in-Death" is highly suggestive because – both within the text of the poem and in life – the game of dice is a game of chance with more than a single possible outcome. The killing of the Albatross may have been committed by chance. Important events, such as the gush of love in the Mariner's heart, the blessing of the water-snakes, the Albatross falling from the Mariner's neck, and the movement and becalming

of the ship, seem to have occurred due to chance. The game of dice plays an important role in the poem. By emphasizing the word dice, Coleridge reveals that the laws and rules in *The Ancient Mariner* are unlike those of the familiar world. If chance were to rule in the world, there would be chaos; however, the same law in the realm of poetic imagination creates harmony. Therefore, it is clear that the laws of imagination are unlike those of the familiar world. Accordingly, *The Ancient Mariner*, with its marvelous supernatural events and characters, can be understood to embody a unity with its own laws, rules and logic. However, the following scene illustrates the consequences of the game of dice and the crew's imminent death. Images are used to foretell an impending evil, following a tradition of superstition:

Till clomb above the eastern bar

The horned Moon, with one bright star

Within the nether tip. (pp. 195-196, ll. 208-10)

After "Life-in-Death" wins the Mariner, he describes the death of the crew: "And every soul, it passed me by, / Like the whizz of my cross-bow!" (p. 196, ll. 222-23). The corpses of the dead on the deck do not rot because their death is enforced by a spiritual agent, like the death of the Albatross. The death of the crew is described with a physical urgency that intensifies the contrast between the crew and the Mariner.

The way the number of the crew is described is significant. Rather than using the phrase "two hundred living men," the poet employs a special formula, "Four times fifty living men" (p. 196, l. 216). Because this method of counting is usually used by children and primitive people, it suggests the primitive and the natural energies and abilities with which the poet is endowed. However, when the Mariner tells his story, the Wedding-Guest suspects that the Mariner is also among those who died and that a ghost is talking to him. Because the Wedding-Guest's world is circumscribed by tradition, he cannot comprehend any other type of death than the purely physical and thus relies on superstition, which spins a web of possibilities, such as the Mariner transforming into a ghost. He interrupts the Mariner, "I fear thee, ancient Mariner! / I fear thy skinny hand!" (p. 196, ll. 224-25). The Wedding-Guest's interruption of the Mariner's tale is also a technique that Coleridge uses to reduce tension and keep his readers in touch with reality.

The Mariner expresses his feeling of acute loneliness and his wait for a savior to help rid him of his agony, suffering, and spiritual barrenness:

Alone, alone, all, all alone

Alone on a wide wide sea!

And never a saint took pity on

My soul in agony. (p. 196, ll. 232-35)

These lines also present the deep anguish that the Mariner feels in exile from the world of the familiar. However, the Mariner's loneliness is accentuated by Coleridge's personal feeling of loneliness, which had been an aspect of his personality since his childhood in Christ's Hospital, where "pent 'mid cloisters dim," he could see "nought lovely but the sky and stars" (p. 242, ll. 52-53). Thus, the theme of exile and homecoming in *The Ancient Mariner* may spring from Coleridge's early memories. This state of alienation reaches its highest level when the self is transformed by its own spiritual powers from the familiar social self into a higher creative self; this occurs to the Mariner during the voyage. For Coleridge, loneliness is related to poetic creativity, and he considered it to be a necessary step towards poetic blessedness. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge quotes two lines of poetry praising loneliness, "They flash upon that inward eye, / Which is the bliss of solitude!" (Vol. 2, p. 110). During one of his voyages, Coleridge saw a lonely duck, which he described to his wife on October 30, 1798: "I saw a wild duck swimming on the waves--a single solitary wild duck--You cannot conceive how interesting, a thing it looked in that round objectless desert of waters" (Griggs, Vol. 1, p. 426).

The Mariner looks everywhere for aid, salvation, and beauty but finds none:

I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;

But or ever a prayer had gusht,

A wicked whisper came, and made

My heart as dry as dust. (p. 197, pp. 244-247)

If we transpose the Mariner's spiritual state into the state of mind that Coleridge believes to be common for a man in spiritual fetters, we can better understand the extent of the Mariner's suffering. The Mariner, as a spiritually fettered man, is cast into a confusion that interrupts his spiritual intercourse not only with others but also with himself. "No wonder then, that he remains incomprehensible to himself as well as to others. No wonder, that, in the

fearful desert of his consciousness, he wearies himself out with empty words, to which no friendly echo answers, either from his own heart, or the heart of a fellow being" (Biographia, Vol. 1, p. 168).

3. The Appreciation of the Water-Snakes and Its Effect:

The Mariner's spirituality begins to revive when the moon shines beautifully and, later, when the Mariner appreciates the beauty of the water-snakes "unaware" under the light of the moon. The Mariner expresses what has happened to him: "A spring of love gushed from my heart, / And I blessed them unaware" (p. 198, ll. 284-285). This passage suggests a type of inner joy that emerges spontaneously and enables the Mariner to cross the threshold between the world of familiarity and creativity. The gush of love transcends the Mariner's self and achieves a new level of spirituality. Thus, after his spiritual transformation, he is able to see true beauty everywhere. He now begins to see things through his creative eyes. The dead sea, which is full of "a thousand thousand slimy things" (p. 197, l. 238) of the "Natura Naturata," is altered and transformed into "Natura Naturans," which is full of "happy living things" (p. 198, l. 282). The Mariner's blessing of the water-snakes unaware does not mean that he is unconscious or that he has lost control over his senses. Rather, it represents a higher state of awareness and consciousness through which the Mariner can see and feel the beauty of nature. Thus, the curse of the Mariner's disconnection with Nature begins to recede. The appreciation of the beauty of the water-snakes marks the climax of the poem and the point at which the events of the poem take a new direction. The Mariner's spiritual revival strongly indicates that he is an individual who is endowed with special imaginative powers and thus is one of a select few. In Schelling's opinion (1963), the moment of inspiration represents "the vivid movement of the innermost energies of the mind and spirit" (p. 355). It is the moment when the secondary imagination is at work in the creative artist and enables the poet to compose his poems. The Mariner is also blessed with this special moment of inspiration. From this moment of inspiration, one can reasonably identify the Mariner with Coleridge. However, the Mariner's blessing of the water-snakes fulfills many symbolic functions. The snakes themselves reveal that the poet's creative power is able to transform things in nature, even poisonous snakes, into beautiful and lovely artistic images. In House's opinion (1953), and in the opinion of others who consider the poem to be a tale of crime, punishment, and expiation, the blessing of the water-snakes symbolizes the "Mariner's recognition of his kinship again with other natural creatures" (p. 102).

The Mariner's transformation reveals that nature is always ready to provide the reawakened heart with beautiful images of life that are available everywhere. The Mariner's experience exemplifies the nature of poetic creativity, particularly for the Romantics, as a spontaneous apprehension of the vital spirit in nature. The Mariner realizes that the vast sea, which seems to be dead, is in reality full of beautiful creatures. Coleridge's words in *The Friend* describe this new phase in the Mariner's voyage as finding "out the east for one's self." True knowledge is received from the savior and the saint within, and "so must all true and living knowledge proceed" (Nabholtz, 1974, pp. 245-246). This knowledge is acquired intuitively and mysteriously, which is why there is no satisfactory rational explanation for the Mariner's shooting of the Albatross or the blessing of the water-snakes. The Mariner's spiritual revival seems to be the result of a spontaneous act of love that is not deliberately achieved. However, the Mariner's blessing of the snakes is not entirely spontaneous because he is prepared for the moment once his mind has responded to divine and cosmic forces and he comes to terms with his reawakened self. Therefore, the climactic moment releases feelings that originate in his awareness of his fallen state and the need to lift him-self up from that state. In a sense, the Mariner creates the water-snakes because they are a means to his salvation.

Coleridge possessed a painter's eye, which found expression in his description of the colors of the water-snakes. His penetrating view of the natural world unveils their natural beauty and the richness of light and shade around them. The movements of the water-snakes with their "rich attire" bring to minds the poet's free, creative imagination and powerful, innate energy. The bright movements of the water-snakes mirror the poet's inner joy. The green of the water-snakes is associated with spring and the revival of life, marking the emergence of the Mariner's imaginative creativity and the revival of his spirituality.

The blessing scene is unique in the sense that it suddenly introduces a burst of light and color and movement into an otherwise dull seascape. The spectacle corresponds to other cosmic events. Immediately after the blessing, "The upper air burst into life!," "The rain poured down from one black cloud," "the ship moved on" (p. 199, ll. 313, 320, 327), and the dead men were inspirited. After the Mariner appreciates the beauty of the water-snakes, all things in nature are completely transformed, and this change is manifested as follows:

I heard the Sky-lark sing;

*Sometimes all little birds that are,
How they seemed to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning! (p. 200, ll. 359-362)*

Instead of the Albatross that had been killed earlier, beautiful singing birds appear. Their appearance is remarkable because it is (Swanepoel, 2010) “highly unlikely to find a selection of little birds in the middle of the ocean, especially in the middle of a seascape with virtually no reference to earth. This indicates the revitalization of the Mariner’s imagination.” Birds and their songs, which appear frequently in Coleridge’s poetry, perform archetypal functions that are also profoundly aesthetic.

At the moment in which the Mariner blesses the water-snakes, the Albatross that had hung around his neck “fell off, and sank / Like lead into the sea” (p. 198, ll. 290-291). The dead Albatross is an emblem of both his spiritual isolation from his creative self and his dissociation from nature. The casting off of the Albatross marks the severing of the Mariner’s last connection with the world of familiarity and the beginning of the full blooming of his imaginative creativity. In other words, it indicates the initiation of the restoration of the Mariner’s integrative ability as a creative self, which enables him to see and hear things from a completely different perspective. After this event, the Mariner regains the power to integrate himself into the outside world. In Pater’s opinion, the dropping of the Albatross from the Mariner’s neck symbolizes his freedom from the confined world in which he lived as “a solitary prisoner” (Adams, 1983, p. 127).

This appreciation of the beauty of the water-snakes occurs under the light of the moon, which is associated with poetic creativity in Coleridge’s poetry. It should be noted that The Ancient Mariner distinguishes between the moon and its light. Before the blessing of the water-snakes, the moon is not associated with creativity but rather with familiarity and superstition. After the blessing of the water-snakes, the image of the moon is elevated to a higher level. The moon, with its variable phases, is associated with changeability, whereas the (Pechey, 2009) “moonlight is a motif of consistently beneficent implication.” The light of the moon and that of the imagination color all of the forces and things in The Ancient Mariner and transform them into an artistic and harmonious whole. Suther (1965) believes that the light of the moon kindles the poet’s mind and that, for Coleridge, its light is a symbol “not of happiness in the sense of peace and mirth, but of the realm of Imagination, of intimate, melancholy-fruitful contact with something beyond and closely

dear, the realm of Vision, of magic” (p. 72). Moreover, the moon and its light, which are hidden by “fog-smoke white” clouds (p. 189, l. 77), symbolize the richness of imagination that is veiled by a thin layer of familiarity. In addition, the image suggests that, soon, the full moon will emerge and the fountain of spirituality will flow. The light of the moon and all of the images in *The Ancient Mariner* that are associated with light symbolize creativity and the revival of spirituality. In the *Biographia*, Coleridge associates the light of the moon with secondary imagination and creativity: “The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moon-light or sun-set, diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature” (Vol. 2, p. 5). House (1953) believes that the light of the moon is used not only to represent creativity but also “for much else, especially in conjunction with the subtler processes of the mind and the more delicate modes of feeling” (p. 112). Lowes (1955) claims that there are several different moons in Coleridge’s mind from his past memories and that he mingled all of these “remembered moons” to form newly imagined moons (p. 163). When the crew is about to die, the moon itself, but not its light, is related to superstitious beliefs in the following way:

The horned Moon, with one bright star

Within the nether tip.

One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,

Too quick for groan or sigh,

Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,

And cursed me with his eye. (p. 196, ll. 210-15)

The light of the sun and the light of the moon in *The Ancient Mariner* reflect the two sides of the imagination. The bright light of the sun reveals everything in the mundane world. The gentle light of the moon, which appears at night, is associated with the subconscious mind, and its objects are thus discerned with the aid of the secondary imagination. Although the light of the sun seems harsh initially, it has a wholesome effect upon the Mariner. Beer (1977) says that, in Coleridge’s supernatural poems, the imagination is symbolized by light and heat: “The one corresponded to a light receiving principle, like that of the moon, the other to an energy like that of the sun, which was always liable to become destructive” (pp. 99-100).

The Mariner praises “Mary Queen” and believes she sends “gentle sleep

from Heaven, / That slide into my soul” (p. 198, l. 294). The Mariner's saint and mother dwell within. Initially, the Mariner tries to recall well-known saints, but none respond. Later – in particular, after the blessing of the water-snakes – Mary Queen, who represents the spiritual fountain within himself, responds to his call. It is possible that the Mariner associates the “Other” with the “Mother” (Bowie, 1993, p. 214) and sends messages to the “Other” to rescue him from his throes but does so in vain. When the frustrated Mariner looks within himself, he finds the answer and his salvation. However, the Mariner's sleep is holy and spiritual, and in it he “dreamt” of rain and of

*The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remained,
I dreamt that they were filled with dew.
(p. 198, ll. 297-299)*

In the dreaming stage, the Mariner immerses himself completely in spiritual joy, which is manifested in the loss of bodily senses and his becoming like a soul: “I moved, and could not feel my limbs: / I was so light --almost” (p. 199, ll. 305-06). This shift indicates that the Mariner has achieved a level of spiritual intensity that he never before has experienced. The Mariner's sleep may be compared with the “sleeping woods at night” (p. 201, l. 371) in which

*A noise like of a hidden brook
In the leafy month of June,
Singeth a quiet tune. (p. 201, ll. 369-70, 372)*

The hidden brook that sings softly to the sleeping woods represents the hidden sacred river of the subconscious, which is the force underlying the Mariner's spiritual transformation and creative imagination.

As with almost every other element in the poem, silence has two levels: the ordinary and the transcendental. The former belongs to the world of familiarity, whereas the latter belongs to the world of creative imagination. Before the blessing of the water-snakes, silence is associated with fearful loneliness and isolation: “And we did speak only to break / The silence of the sea!” (p. 190, ll. 109-110), but after the blessing, “the silence sank / Like music on my heart” (p. 205, ll. 498-499).

Because the world of the imagination is governed and ruled by its own laws, resurrection is possible. The crew's dead bodies are inspirited by an angelic troop: "It had been strange, even in a dream, / To have seen those dead men rise" (p. 200, ll. 333-334). What seems to be lifeless and dead can easily be the source of new life in the world of the creative imagination. The crew seems to be transformed into different beings when their bodies are inspirited by angels. The relationship between the Mariner and the crew's inspirited bodies is different from the relationship that the crew had with the Mariner when they were alive. This new relationship is expressed by the Mariner's description of the activities of the inspirited bodies and their behavior towards him (p. 200, ll. 339-344).

House (1953) claims, without providing evidence, that the part of the poem in which Coleridge describes the relationship between the Mariner and the body of his "brother's son" "is decidedly weak." Moreover, House considers this relationship to be a "violation of family ties" (p. 109). These claims naturally follow from the position that House adopts in understanding and interpreting the poetic themes under discussion because he consistently attempts to stay as close as possible to the literal meaning of the text.

A new phase begins with the Mariner's return to the world of primary imagination. The ship begins to move shoreward with great speed. The Mariner discerns two voices after he begins to recover from the "swound" (p. 202, l. 391) caused by the great speed of the ship. The first voice speaks harshly about the Mariner's killing of the Albatross (p. 202, ll. 389-401). The other voice, which sounds "As soft as honey-dew" (p. 202, l. 407), speaks about the Mariner's penance, "And penance more will do" (p. 202, l. 409). The sternness of the first voice belongs to the world of the primary imagination, whereas the honey-like sweetness of the second voice belongs to the world of the secondary imagination. The inspirited bodies "stood as signals to the land, / Each one a lovely light" (p. 205, ll. 494-495). These figures row the ship, an action indicating that the Mariner remains on his imaginative voyage. At the sight of land, the Mariner expresses his happiness:

Is this the hill? is this the kirk?

Is this my own country?

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,

And I with sobs did pray-

O let me be awake, my God!

Or let me sleep away. (p. 204, ll. 466-471)

Lines 470–471 express the agony of the transformational period. The Mariner prays to God not to leave him in-between an “awaking” state, which represents the world of familiarity, and “sleep,” which represents the realm of the imagination. This is the state of “Life-in-Death,” with its throes and excruciating agony. The happiness that the Mariner derives from his return to the world of familiarity indicates that returning to normality is easy compared to the difficulty of leaving it to enter the realm of creativity.

4. The Mariner's Return to His Country and the End of the Voyage:

The Mariner's expression of love for his country reveals Coleridge's deep feeling for his own land. In general, a love of one's country is considered to be a common virtue. However, when viewed in the context of a romantic nostalgia for home and a nagging feeling of homelessness, the statement suggests a different scenario. Coleridge, like the Mariner, was a wanderer in his own country, and homelessness haunted Coleridge throughout his life. In a letter to Thomas Poole, Coleridge said, “However, my Country is my Country; and I will never leave it, till I am starved out of it” (Griggs, 1956, Vol. 2, p. 711). For Coleridge, returning home from abroad was always bittersweet because the return was followed by a feeling of homelessness. Holmes (1989) states that, in Coleridge's writings, there is always an attempt “to return home, recover the feelings of home, or somehow--marvelously--to invent them” (p. 10).

As the Mariner's spiritual voyage nears its end, the angelic spirits depart from the ship. The appearance of some of the characters of the world of familiarity, such as the “Hermit,” the “Pilot,” and the “Pilot's boy,” are further signs that the voyage is nearly complete. The Mariner is delighted to be able to return to a normal life: “Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy / The deadmen could not blast” (p. 206, ll. 506-507). This is the type of joy typically experienced after completing an imaginative endeavor. The Mariner believes in the “Hermit's” special powers over the soul: “He'll shrive my soul, he'll wash away / The Albatross's blood” (p. 206, ll. 512-513). Such a belief is as superstitious as the crew's belief that the Albatross was a bird of good omen.

The ship itself is withering and is compared to a leaf in autumn: “The planks looked warped! and sere those sails, / How thin they are and sere!” (p. 206, ll. 529-530). This image reflects the withering away of the Mariner's imagination. At this stage, the ship is about to sink and die like the crew. It becomes an object of nature, with a natural life course and a natural end; only underlying supernaturalism transforms it into an evil omen:

Brown skeletons of leaves that lag

My forest-brook along;

When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow.

(pp. 206-207, ll. 533-535)

However, the imaginative voyage ends at the moment that the ship comes in contact with the boat that carries the “Hermit,” the “Pilot,” and the “Pilot’s boy”: “It reached the ship, it split the bay; / The ship went down like lead (p. 207, ll. 548-549). This indicates that the Mariner’s normal relationship with others has been reestablished. This relationship is similar to the previous relationship of the Mariner to the crew and other creatures prior to the Mariner’s appreciation of the beauty of the water-snakes.

The spiritual spell and the wellspring of imagination come to an end, but some traces of these influences remain on the Mariner’s physical appearance. However, the implications of these traces are intelligible only to a select few. For example, the “Hermit” recognizes these traces, “The holy Hermit raised his eyes / And prayed where he did sit” (p. 535, ll. 562-63). However, the other two figures represent those who do not appreciate the implications of the traces. For example, the “Pilot” and the “Pilot’s boy” behave differently: “The Pilot shrieked” and “the Pilot’s boy who now / doth crazy go” (p. 535, ll. 560, 564-65). The Mariner could not fully rest because “at an uncertain hour, / That agony returns.” The Mariner is relieved only when his “tale is told” to another person, and until he does this, his “heart within [him] burns” (p. 208, ll. 582- 85). Khetarpal (2012) explains this scenario by claiming that what happened to the Mariner “is beyond psychical and psychological explanation in texture[,] nature and essence.” This is true because the Mariner’s restlessness symbolizes the poet’s need to sing his song, which appears spontaneously, similar to the Mariner’s blessing of the water-snakes. Prickett (1970) notes that the agony returns to the Mariner because of his “depth of insight,” which is so “profound as to leave him no longer at ease” (p. 133).

The Mariner realizes that he is a person with special abilities and says, “I have strange powers of speech” (p. 208, l. 587). The word “speech” in this context means poetry, and these abilities are the result of the secondary imagination found in creative artists and poets. For Coleridge, these special powers of imagination “would appear incredible to persons not accustomed to these subtle notices of self-observation” (Coburn, 1951, p. 53). In addition to his having “strange powers of speech,” the Mariner has the ability to

recognize “the man that must hear” him (p. 208, l. 589). Here, the Mariner seems to represent the poet, whereas the Wedding-Guest represents the reader, who is able to understand and appreciate him. The Mariner emphasizes his loneliness to his listener: “O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been / Alone on a wide wide sea” (p. 208, ll. 597-598). The Mariner’s deep feeling of loneliness mirrors the poet’s state of alienation from his familiar self and others, which is necessary for him to transcend the bounds of ordinary life. In this situation, the Mariner asks the Wedding-Guest to accompany him “To walk together to the kirk” (p. 208, ll. 605). The return to ordinary life with its religious beliefs and practices, such as the presence of priests, church gatherings, and other aspects of social life described toward the conclusion of the poem, marks the end of the Mariner’s spirituality. This return also marks the end of the poet’s creativity.

5. The Moral Precepts at the Conclusion of the Poem:

To some extent, the moral precepts at the conclusion of the poem reveal Coleridge’s uncertainty and timidity in thinking freely and creating accordingly. Perhaps Coleridge’s “mental cowardice” creeps into his innermost self because of his self-admitted habit of procrastination (*Biographia*, Vol. 1, p. 31). Thus, the conclusion of *The Ancient Mariner* is anticlimactic and the opposite of what might be expected of the Mariner after his great spiritual voyage. In House’s opinion (1953), the Mariner “has a great spiritual experience” but is “certainly not a great courageous spiritual adventurer” (p. 96). Because the Mariner is not able to endure the expanses of the shoreless sea of the poetic imagination, he returns to the land of conventional religion and the world of familiarity.

It is true that the concluding moral precepts emphasize the importance of creaturely love. However, the all-embracing and deep love that is differenced is very different from what was revealed to the Mariner after he came to appreciate the beauty of the water-snakes. Coleridge believed deeply in brotherly love. He wrote in *Biographia* (1927), “we must not only love our neighbors as ourselves, but ourselves likewise as our neighbors” (Vol. 2, p. 210). However, from an artistic perspective, the love that gushed in the Mariner’s heart is a transcendent feeling that unites all of the divided aspects of the self in a moment of epiphany. It encompasses both a love of created things and a love binding together the fragmented selves of the artist.

In *Table Talk*, Coleridge (2005) disputed the charge leveled by critics of *The Ancient Mariner* that the poem lacked moral lessons. Coleridge strongly asserted that the poem is filled with morality: “Mrs. Barbauld once told me

that she admired the Ancient Mariner, but that there were two faults in it,--it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability, I owned that might admit some question; but as to the want of moral, I told her that in my own judgment the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination.” Although Coleridge’s comments on the moral precepts at the end of *The Ancient Mariner* might be accepted at face value, it should be noted that “too much moralizing” limits the scope of interpretation and limits the poem’s dimensions by an emergent morality that is neither aesthetically reconcilable nor required either by the story or by the principles of composition. Coleridge’s comments thus irrationalize the content and introduce an element of facetiousness that does not accord with the poem’s exceptional artistic content because conveying a moral lesson or passing a moral judgment through creative art is not conducive to the expression of the types of truths that artistic works embody. Moralizing also disrupts the free play of the imaginations of both the poet and the reader (Read, 1963) and is “foreign to the aesthetic attitude. It interferes with the natural operation of aesthetic faculties and destroys the whole basis of appreciation in arts” (p. 197). Richards (1987) also claims that the effort behind conveying a moral lesson in any work of art is “a very serious obstacle” to its understanding (p. 273). Coleridge’s moralizing does not correspond to the main body of *The Ancient Mariner* and reads like a passage from a cheap sermon. It is important to note that Coleridge himself opposed obvious moralizing in poetry. In *Biographia*, he asserts that the “communication of pleasure is the introductory means by which alone the poet must expect to moralize his readers” (Vol. 2, p. 105). Bowra (1988) claims that Coleridge, in his “later years,” was unhappy with the ending of *The Ancient Mariner* “and would have liked it to be less emphatic” (p. 66). However, critics who believe that the themes of the poem are crime, punishment, and reconciliation defend the poet’s attempt to convey moral precepts toward the conclusion of the poem. Yarlott (1967) states that the end mirrors a true “spiritual awareness” (p. 95), Islam (1987) claims that it is a “continuous initiation into the secrets of existence” (p. 70), and House (1953) believes that this section of the poem provides us with an experience that “has been lived” (p. 92).

The Wedding-Guest is deeply affected by the Mariner’s tale and becomes a “sadder and a wiser man” (p. 209, l. 624). The term “sadder and wiser” is significant for Coleridge and assumes a proverbial form in his writings. Coleridge writes in a letter to his friend Thomas Poole, “it would have made

you, my friend! 'a sadder and a wiser man,' if you had been with me at one of Home Tooke's public Dinners!' (Griggs, 1956, Vol. 2, p. 720). It is important to note (Harding, 1974) that the word "sadder" is used with "the connotations of its older meaning," implying seriousness and steadfastness (p. 57). Perhaps, as Wimsatt (1964) believes, a wise man is often sad because "Nature and Passion are powerful, but they are also full of grief" (p. 608). The wise man becomes sad due to his realization of his own fate and the finitude of his life compared to the infinity of the universe.

6. Conclusion:

The voyage takes the form of a cycle that begins in the realm of consciousness, leads to a poetic trance, and finally concludes with the return to the world of consciousness. In other words, the voyage begins in the realm of the primary imagination, proceeds through a transformational phase, and culminates in the realm of the secondary imagination. The Mariner returns to the world of the primary imagination after the poetic spell has ended. The voyage symbolizes the reawakening of the poet's creativity from the slumber of familiarity. The poet is unable to accept life as it is because doing so would mark the end of poetry for him.

The voyage is the discovery of terra incognita, that is, the invisible creative self through the Mariner's imagination. It is a spiritual, poetic adventure with the poet's living soul – the I AM – at its core.

The changes and transformation that the Wedding-Guest undergoes indicate that he is completely enthralled by an idea that is, to use Coleridge's phrase, "dearer than the self" to him (Lay Sermons, 2005, p. 25). Everyone is in need of an inward voyage to realize his or her true self. There are many internal and external obstacles to such a voyage. However, for a person undaunted by these obstacles who is determined to pursue such a voyage, new venues to truth are revealed, and new lights are seen even in the insignificant and familiar.

The superstitions, traditions, and conventions of society; personal habits such as intellectual timidity; and the minutiae of everyday life are an individual's albatrosses. It is difficult to overcome these albatrosses, but it is the only way to achieve real humanity. New directions in life are needed for a transcendence that opens the rewarding world of spirituality. As Coleridge notes, (1927) "the Inner Sense cannot have its direction determined by any other object" (Biographia, Vol. 1, p. 172) than itself.

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