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## ***The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: An Ecocritical Approach***

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### **Abstract:**

Man's desire to know, to discover, to dominate, and to prosper has resulted in a variety of responses from Nature. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1797-1798) is about a transatlantic voyage of discovery abound with natural descriptions that make it a nature/environment poem. British imperialist voyages of discovery and transmission of the Western culture to Oriental lands—the Pacific in the poem—can be looked at, from an ecocritical point of view, as threats imposed upon Nature (native lands and peoples). This study is an exploration of Nature's responses to the Mariner's venture into the pacific, and the violent act of shooting an albatross that belongs to Nature and signifies native lands and peoples. Coleridge remains uncertain in his view of colonization and cross-cultural interactions with the East; thus, he finds Nature an excellent ecocritical context to show what the aftermath of such transatlantic ideological voyages may be.

**Keywords:** Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Nature, Culture, Ecocriticism.

*He prayeth best, who loveth best*

*All things both great and small;*

*For the dear God who loveth us,*

*He made and loveth all. (7. 614-617)*

### **Introduction**

Nature and poetry have always had a close affinity, and the aesthetic exploration of Nature has been a major poetic concern. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

(1797-1798) as a poem of transatlantic voyage or exploration of the unknown lands can certainly be called an environment poem or an ecocritical piece of poetry. Whether the poet gives an account of real happenings or imaginative ones in the poem makes no real difference, for according to Vallins, “certain things are simply beyond human understanding” (1996: 54). This is to say that Coleridge’s exploration of mysteries of Nature in *The Rime* is enough to call the poem an environment one. Romantic poetry, by and large, shows a passion for the unknown and the supernatural that may be found in Nature. Coleridge begins with Nature, goes to higher things and meanings, and then “return[s] to Nature” as Morse Peckham quotes Jacques Barzun in his “Romanticism and the Modern Ego” (1943) (1970: 233). Thus, an ecocritical reading of *The Rime* seems justifiable. Robert Penn Warren in his influential essay “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: A Poem of Pure Imagination” (1956) observes the Christian paradigm of “crime and punishment and reconciliation” in the poem (233). Though insightful, the discussed issues, certainly, need further clarification in order to provide the reader with a more exact study of Nature and its significance in Coleridge’s poem. An ecocritical approach seems to do the job well.

The term ‘ecocriticism’ was coined by William Rueckart in 1978 in his essay entitled “Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism.” *The New Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (2010) defines ‘ecology’ as “the relation of plants and living creatures to each other and to their environment” (482). This implies that, from an ecocritical point of view, every living being is in interaction with both other creatures and the environment; a symbiotic relationship. Cheryll Glotfelty defines ‘ecocriticism,’ in *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (as cited in Garrard 2007: 3) and there is no doubt Nature has always enjoyed a remarkable place in (romantic) literature. Man’s desire to know, to discover, to dominate, and to prosper has resulted in a variety of responses from Nature that either rewards or punishes man who seeks survival, and sometimes betrays Nature by violating the already-existing harmony between man and Nature and beast.

British imperialist voyages of discovery and transmission of the Western culture to Oriental lands—the Pacific—can be looked at as threats imposed upon a wild Nature with her wild animals, plants and inhabitants. In his poem, Coleridge makes no reference to what happens to the natives and how they and their lands are treated by sailors. This is because, from a Saidean perspective, Coleridge could not act outside historical and cultural forces surrounding him to the extent that Spivak believes that “nineteenth-century British Literature cannot be read without remembering that imperialism [...] was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English” (Knellwolf and Norris 2007: 211). The years between 1744 and 1760 marked the French English wars the violence of which led to even more competition for transatlantic voyages of expansion and economic growth. The influence was so vast on poets of the time that a defender of freedom and equality like Coleridge, in *Table Talk*, stated that “colonization [was] not only a manifest expedient—but an imperative duty on Great Britain. God seems to hold out his finger to us over the sea” (Woodring 1990: 84). From a Fanonian point of view “colonized

lands” were the “female body” to be conquered (McClintock 1995: 121) by British sailors who were thinking of founding new homes in the colonies. Despite the anti-colonial lectures made under the influence of Edmund Burke, Coleridge desired his own pantisocratic colony over the sea which signifies that a Romantic poet like Coleridge was shaped by the cultural ideologies of discovery and superiority. However, an ecocritical reading of *The Rime* can, hopefully, reveal that Coleridge was not satisfied with such explorations, and instead, would believe in them as violations of Nature.

The myth of the national hero was debunked by such romantic poets as Coleridge, Robert Southey or Helen Maria Williams. Back home, sailors were no longer viewed as British naval heroes but rather wanderers and threats to domestic affection and purity. After returning home, there was the possibility that the mariners had been exposed to demonic possession and, accordingly, could be bringers of diseases. In *The Rime* everything is diseased: the bloody sun is diseased; body of the ship is warped; the hermit is “a figure for decay” (Lee 1998: 680) praying at a “rotted old oak stump” (l. 522). Nature punishes the Mariner by entrapping him within the circulation of cultures: Being caught in Bhabha’s “hybrid” or “in-between” condition, the Mariner becomes a figure resembling both the colonizer and the colonized, and loses home while on the Pacific and exposed to a native culture. Back home the Mariner “holds [the Wedding-Guest] with his skinny hand,” (l. 9) and “with his glittering eye—” (l. 13) while the Wedding-Guest “listens like a three years’ child” (l. 15) and cannot choose but hear;” (l. 18). This study argues that Nature determines the course of actions, with either reward or punishment, when man meddles with the affairs of Nature by threatening native lands and cultures. Therefore, a closer look at Nature from the viewpoint of Coleridge seems necessary to the discussion.

## Nature

For an ecocritical reading of Coleridge’s *The Rime*, the link between Coleridge and Nature must be studied, as the interrelation between Nature and human beings is the core of ecocriticism. Since Coleridge’s poetry takes part in Nature and his poems abound with natural descriptions that bestow a lyrical quality upon his poems, he is a poet of Nature. Fletcher goes farther to say that “description in fact is the most important necessary preliminary to Romantic aesthetic” (2004: 51). Nevertheless, description of Nature was not, as it might seem so, an easy task for Coleridge, for he was confronted with the two inner and outer worlds which he had no way but to describe simultaneously. On the one hand, Coleridge had to describe Nature as a source of inspiration, wonders and home to the supernatural, and on the other, he had to discover the unknown parts of his own psyche to project upon the outer world or Nature. The difficulty, therefore, was in simultaneous descriptions of self and Nature; actual and the visionary; and natural objects and such abstract concepts as life, God, freedom, democracy, self and revolution. Brice is right to say that, according to Coleridge, “Nature [was] viewed as an analogue of the self and the self [was] viewed as an analogue of Nature” (2007: 97).

It must be mentioned that one cannot simply conclude that Nature was merely an objective correlative to reflect Coleridge's mind, or studying one was equal to studying the other. Certainly Coleridge's quest in Nature was a quest in the mind or the self's internal landscape. However, the complexity lies in the fact that Coleridge's imagination had perceived, not merely the life and presence of Nature, but also, to what considerable extent could Nature affect one's life: human beings' meddling with affairs of the environment would certainly be followed by the environment's responses.

To Coleridge, Nature was a place he could seek refuge in and stay away from the political turmoil of the time. There, he could remember a joyful impression or moment of experience from the past and refresh himself as Wordsworth would say in *Lines Composed a few Miles above Tintern Abbey* (1798) about Nature: "The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse / The guide, the guardian of my heart, and the soul / Of all my moral being" (Abrams and Greenblatt 2001, 1434). Brice's words that Coleridge "undoubtedly 'personifies' Nature by transposing mind-like qualities to inanimate objects, but Nature also 'reifies' and shapes his own poetic psyche" (2007: 98) are close to the argument of this study that Coleridge was thinking about how man's interruption of Nature would elicit Nature's influences back on man's body and soul.

Influenced by Schlegel an appreciator of Nature, Coleridge would look at Nature as an inspiring power, moral guide as well as enkindler of his imagination. Holmes relates the beauties and joys of Nature to "emotional education." He states that Coleridge "describes Hartley as a 'child of Nature,' who will gain religious awareness through the beauties of the natural world [...] The child finds Nature already 'hospitable'" (1989: 183). In "Frost at Midnight" (1798), the poet even feels the presence of God in Nature (the ministry of frost). Nature is associated with "that eternal language, which thy God / Utters, who from eternity doth teach / Himself in all, and all things in himself" (Richards 1971: 129) which is a reference to the harmonious act of reconciliation taking place within the 'One Life.'

Also influenced by Berkeley's theory of 'immaterialism,' Coleridge identified the mind with Nature. In Berkeleyan thesis, "Nature is the language of God;" "the existence of sensible beings consists in their being perceived by a mind," and that "these things of Nature are directly communicated to us by God to reveal his creative and conserving presence." Appleyard also adds that "the apprehension of these ideas is the function of pure intellect, spirit responding to spirit" (1965: 49). House's words are also relevant: "*Ancient Mariner* in which "Nature" is related to "the moral world" is written by a poet whose "heart and intellect [are] intimately combined and unified with the great appearances of Nature" (1964: 173).

In "Destiny of Nations," Coleridge refers to Nature's intelligence: "Nature's vast ever-acting Energy! / In will, in deed, Impulse of All to All!" (PW 1912: 147). For Coleridge "unity with Nature and living things [was] also unity with God" (Prickett 1975, p. 24) thus Nature, "symbolizes the spiritual life of man" (Wimsatt and Brooks 1970: 393). Appleyard states that Coleridge's vision of Nature was that it was "divine [and] the ground and guarantee of the unity

of the created universe” (1965: 9). This implies the Romantic rejection of the Cartesian belief of human beings possessing souls; Coleridge believed everything in Nature was alive, beautiful and with a soul. According to Brice, “to the pious man all Nature is thus beautiful because its every feature is the symbol and all its parts the written language of infinite Goodness and all powerful intelligence” (2007: 109-110).

Coleridge saw Nature as a (visible) language. This allowed him to remark upon God’s benevolence and assume that “the world, rather than a machine was [...] a vehicle of communication between God and humanity” (Brice 2007: 109). Lines 42 through 48 of “Fears in Solitude” (1798) read:

We have offended, oh! My countrymen! We have offended very grievously

And been most tyrannous. From east to west

A groan of accusation pierces Heaven!

The wretched plead against us; multitudes

Countless and vehement, the Sons of God.

Our Brethren. (Richards 1971: 138-139)

In “Ode to the Departing Year” (1796) Coleridge introduces Nature as an important agent who punishes Britain for her participation in the slave trade and other crimes: “strange-eyed Destruction! Who with many a dream / Of central fires through nether seas up-thundering / Soothes her fierce solitude ...” (PW 1912: 167-168). Nature shows her benign as well as cruel and hostile sides to human beings, and avenges when human beings go against God’s will and cause violence. It is noteworthy that the ‘spectre-bark’ and ‘the Polar Spirit’ approach the mariners as agents of revenge. More will be said on this.

Here it can be noticed that Coleridge would look at Nature herself as a divine agent. As a matter of fact “the main achievement of Coleridge’s religious philosophy was [...] the Platonic theory of the world as an expression of the Divine Ideas” (Rule 1974: 307). Certainly for Coleridge whose effort was “to reconcile ‘all the affairs of man as a process’ within God’s providence,” (Roe 1990, p. 13) Nature was the language of God. This pantheistic idea is manifest in these lines from “The Eolian Harp:” “Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze, / At once the Soul of each, and God of All?” (PW 1912: 102). Therefore, to Coleridge, ignorance of God would mean violation of Nature which is one of the central ideas in the poet’s “Religious Musings” (1974) as well. According to Appleyard “the only obstacle to the individual’s happiness is superstition, or ignorance of God as Supreme Reality, which only Faith can overcome” (1965: 40). Being influenced by the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth who believed that there was a “God, an omnipotent understanding Being, presiding over all,” (1845: xxxiv) one can have a better understanding of Coleridge’s view of God and Nature. Coleridge in



a letter to Charles Tulk wrote that “all that exists has a beginning—and God [is] the Beginner of their existence; God createth all things [...] in him they have their Being, from him they receive their existence,” (Hedley 2003: 86) i. e., to Coleridge, “God is in man and man is in God” (Ibid.: 291).

The pantheistic philosophy of ‘One Life’ behind romantic (Nature) poems—line 26 of Coleridge’s “The Aeolian Harp” reads “the One Life within us and abroad—implies that Coleridge saw Nature as a divine agent, and saw God diffused in Nature making it an organic unity. Manifestation of God in man and Nature signifies Coleridge’s removal of boundary between the natural and the supernatural, by believing that “the rational order, harmony and beauty of the natural world [...] were the objective counterpart of a subjective order and cognitive harmony present within the human mind” (Brice 2007: 96). Perhaps Coleridge had it in the back of his mind that the venture into the Pacific in the name of discovery of unknown lands and also for bringing slaves, and colonizing virgin lands was, at the same time, a violation of Nature and the divinity. This can be detected in the Mariner’s shooting of the bird and what follows.

### **The Act of Shooting, and Nature’s Response**

The Mariner’s voyage begins cheerfully: “ship was cheered, the harbor cleared / Merrily did we drop” (ll. 21-22). However, the nature of the voyage changes as the ship heads towards the Pacific, and the Mariner shoots the albatross: “With my crossbow / I shot the ALBATROSS” (ll. 81-82). This motiveless act of malignity, from an ecocritical point of view, seems to mean a betrayal of Nature—the bird belongs to Nature—and God—the bird signifies the ‘One Life’ and the language of God. Stiller believes that “the Mariner’s abrupt and seemingly motiveless shooting of the albatross becomes a violation of the ‘one life’ principle” (1992: 144). Nature responds to a rational being like the Mariner who shoots a non-rational creature like the albatross that belongs to Nature and signifies the ‘One Soul’ running through all creatures. The act of shooting can be interpreted as the Mariner’s conscious and unconscious desire to kill, to control, to dominate, to know and to possess native lands to which the bird belongs, for killing the bird is killing the natural world, the natives and the unity in Nature.

The act of shooting changes the harmony between man and Nature into disharmony. The albatross may be, according to McGann, “part of the Mariner’s superstitious preconceptions,” (1990: 229) however, there can exist a variety of layers of meaning for the bird. It is associated with the moonshine, the mist, the snow, and the mother Nature whose life is threatened by the Mariner who as an everyman, threatens motherhood, reproduction, imagination and femininity. There is no talk of the Mariner’s family, and he seems to have no place in his family which can signify that the Mariner is no longer a reproduction agent. Back home, the Mariner seems to be a sterile figure with his skinny hands, and a wasteland of horror in sharp contrast with the fertility of the marriage ceremony going on.

The bird is associated with the breeze: “And I had done a hellish thing, / And it would work ’em woe: / For all averred, I had killed the bird / That made the breeze to blow” (ll. 91-94). Nature avenges by stopping the wind—one of the most meaningful romantic images—that is necessary for the movement of the ship and the lives of the mariners.

The wind stops to blow but a death ship, surprisingly, approaches. The dance of fire is visible everywhere and the water assumes strange colours. Death, a Freudian father figure, approaches to castrate the agents of treachery, and the fatal woman approaches as a bringer of disease and horror:

Her lips were red, her looks were free,

Her looks were yellow as gold:

Her skin was white as leprosy,

The Night-mare LIFE-IN-Death was she,

Who thicks man’s blood with cold. (3. 190-194)

The Mariner as an outcast is won by the white woman, and changes to a slave existing in Bhabha’s state of “hybridity.” The Mariner meets his other which according to Bhabha is “never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse” (2000: 4). Nature takes revenge by depriving the mariners of the power of speech and meaningful exchange, for they have betrayed the “eternal language.” Parching heat dominates the mariners—of which global warming is a modern version—and Nature which has turned cruel offers neither wind nor rain, turning the sky to “hot and copper” with a “bloody sun” in the middle:

Day after day, day after day

We stuck, nor breath nor motion;

As idle as a painted ship

Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, everywhere,

And all the boards did shrink;

Water, water, everywhere,

Nor any drop to drink. (2. 115- 122)

And then the mariners die, one by one: “The many men, so beautiful / And they all dead did lie:” (ll. 236-237). The Mariner “looked upon the rotting sea” (l. 240), and he “looked upon



the rotting deck / And there the dead men lay” (ll. 242-243). The changes in Nature can be said to be the signs of God’s anger though no tsunami is referred to. The Mariner has betrayed divinity the result of which is his entrapment within the circle of hell and dances of fire just outside the cycle of divinity. The Mariner falls to doubt and passivity, and experiences spiritual death within the heat of the sea which later marks his sterility. This is why Woodman’s belief that if “the bird in its mythical configuration were not shot, the Mariner would remain an eternal child in Eden. The shooting is an initiation into life” (1980: 66) does not seem justifiable. The Mariner kills life by killing the soul of Nature.

The Mariner as a violator of Nature is, also, the violator of the ideology of racial difference that acts to maintain control over the colonized other. By interrupting foreign lands and peoples, the Mariner is likely to cause cultural mixture and contamination in the very act of negotiation of identities; he has violated the discursively constructed binary opposition of Western superiority and Oriental inferiority, and has finally become a threatening figure wearing a frightening complexion that lets not the Wedding-Guest move. The Mariner is changed by Nature to a vampiric other who cannibalizes himself by sucking his own blood at the sight of the ‘spectre-bark.’ Although there is no mention of the cruel treatment of the natives, sexual and cultural exploitation of the slaves is not hard to grasp. Nineteenth century British community would look at such confrontations as racial mixture and impurity that removes the boundary between the superior West and the inferior East.

The Mariner loses faith in Nature’s benevolence and cannot pray: “I looked to heaven, and tried to pray; / But or ever a prayer had gushed, / A wicked whisper came, and made / My heart as dry as dust” (ll. 244-247). The death experienced by the mariners, and a sign of Nature fighting back is interpreted by Prickett as the punishment for praising the Mariner’s violent act of shooting the bird: “his fellow sailors are at first horrified, and then, when the weather improves, praise him for his action. For this inconstancy or error of judgment they are condemned to die a lingering death” (1975: 26). This suggests that the act is so hideous that it causes anxiety, tension and uncertainty in the mariners who were not sure if “Twas right [...] such birds to slay” or if it was “a hellish thing” (ll. 101; 91). It is the Mariner who really ruins the union between Nature and the mariners—“dynamic organicism”—putting them in “static mechanism” or the “period of doubt and despair.” Peckham’s words are insightful: “The Mariner, on his journey around the world, or through life, violates the faith of his fellow-men by shooting the albatross, the one thing alive in the world of ice and snow, always symbol of spiritual coldness and death.” Peckham continues that the other mariners “reject him, marking him with the sign of his own guilt. From the world of ice and snow [‘static mechanism’] they come to the world of fire and heat, again symbols of spiritual death, alienation, and suffering. The soul of the mariner is owned by Life-IN-Death” (1970: 245). Being entrapped within the “static mechanism” of the sea, the mariners are no longer able to progress with their journey. An ecocritical view would suggest Nature hindering further movement and determining the course of action.

The diseased Mariner becomes an outcast feeling “alone, alone, all, all alone / Alone on a wide wide sea!” (ll. 232-233). Harding says the Mariner becomes a “ruined man” and “no more achieves a full rebirth” (1941: 341). The Mariner changes; he is dehumanized, lacks speech, is ghostly, passes like night and finds strange powers. He loses his mind, for it is in relation with Nature (the language of God) that his mind is meaningful. This is why at the end the hermit is needed to purge the Mariner, though partially, before he can enter his own community. Besides, the corruption caused by the white (Eastern) woman must be purged by the (Western) hermit so that the Mariner may be able to find a place home. This means that the Mariner as an introducer and representative of Western culture to foreigners is, in his land, accused of sexual impurity and cultural exchange in the sense that he has become like the natives, the colonized.

Coleridge who was a firm believer in the interconnectedness of all creatures as well as the inner Nature and the outer Nature, reconciles opposites in the poem thus, the poem is an exploration of the union between mind and Nature. In a letter to Southey, Coleridge wrote that “everything has a life of its own, and that we are all One Life” (House 1964: 185). He knew the love of God and Nature to be equal, and believed that man, beast and Nature have become one in God. In “Religious Musings,” (1794) Coleridge describes God:

From himself he flies,

Stands in the sun, and with no partial gaze

Views all creation; and he loves it all,

And blesses it, and calls it very good!

This is indeed to dwell with the Most High! (*PW* 1912: 113)

Coleridge’s metaphysical belief was that all creatures were from the same source. The Mariner becomes a wanderer between Nature and the poet’s imagination that creates sympathy between man and Nature that find meaning within God. Hedley states that for Coleridge, “the self as a relatively isolated item is a rather poor and abstract phenomenon. The real self is permeated by the existence of other selves,” (2003: 173) and “the mind’s loving affinity or communion with the hidden structures of the universe” (Ibid. p. 228). Appleyard believes that central to Coleridge’s philosophy (of literature) was “the relationship of external Nature to the mind and imagination” (1965: 5). McKusick, also, states that for Coleridge, “it is not enough for the poet to be a detached observer of picturesque scenery; rather, the poet must seek a “sweet and indissoluble union” with the natural world” (2005: 422). In *Anima Poetae*, Coleridge says “in looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking [...] I seem rather to be seeking [...] a symbolical language for something within me that already and forever exists” (Wimsatt and Brooks 1970: 394). It is understood that Nature rewards by giving joy and the chance to know oneself and believe in the unity among all creatures. According to McKusick, Romantic poetry helps one “articulate new ways of perceiving and knowing the self in relation to the natural

world” (2005: 427). This signifies that the link between man and Nature culminates in joy that activates the imagination which can recreate the link between the two and make it more meaningful. The esemplastic power of imagination recreates Nature, and Nature, in return, inspires the mind with divine joy. Coleridge’s “Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement” (1796) and “This Lime-tree Bower My Prison” (1797) are also examples of Coleridge’s active communion with Nature. In “Lime-tree,” Coleridge discovers beauty everywhere, and “Nature ne’er deserts the wise and pure” (Richards 1971: 78). The bird in the poem is a sign of blessing and its wing crosses “the mighty Orb’s dilated glory” (Ibid.).

The significance of sense-bound perception in the poem is that the Mariner’s very perceptions bestow meaning upon Nature, and the union between man and Nature as well as the perception of God occur within these perceptions. Nature can help one see, hear and feel God, therefore the act of shooting is a violation of the senses of sight and hearing. The act of killing is a betrayal of God in Nature, since “God is not, for Coleridge, [...] a mysterious supernatural agent [...] but the intelligible ground and archetype of the sensible realm” (Hedley 2003: 223). The violation, also, violates man’s imaginative perception of God: John Beer says the ice disappears and is replaced by the merciless heat of the sun. Though “acting as a protection for the ship and its crew, the ice causes serious threat for her.” Beer refers to the speculations of Jacob Boehme that his “insistence on the benevolence of God led him to the doctrine that if God at times seemed angry, this was no more than appearance, engendered by the diseased imagination of fallen man” (as cited in Natarajan 2007: 125-126). A violation of the senses (‘primary imagination’) causes a diseased imagination (‘secondary imagination’) that fails to create and recognize the ‘organic unity’ in Nature.

The (primary) imaginative perception is absolutely necessary for the Mariner’s transformation. A new phase begins, after the Mariner fails in his relation with God and Nature, when Nature herself comes to the Mariner’s aid:

Beyond the shadow of the ship,  
I watched the water snakes:  
They moved in tracks of shining white,  
And when they reared, the elfish light  
Fell off in hoary flakes.  
Within the shadow of the ship  
I watched their rich attire:  
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,  
They coiled and swam; and every track

Was a flash of golden fire. (4. 272-281)

As an excellent example of sense-bound perception, these lines show that Nature triggers the Mariner's 'primary imagination' who praises the beauty of water snakes. The Mariner's blessing of the Oriental water snakes signifies the Western mission of taking blessings to the East. The act of praising is, also, like seeing God in Nature that relocates the bond between the Mariner and Nature. The joyous, alive and once again friendly Nature makes the Mariner confess:

O happy living things! No tongue

Their beauty might declare:

A spring of love gushed from my heart,

And I blessed them unaware:

Sure my kind saint took pity on me,

And I blessed them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray;

And from my neck so free

The albatross fell off, and sank

Like lead into the sea. (4. 282-291)

The Mariner's imaginative sympathy with Nature brings the mariners to life again with seraphs symbolizing resurrection and redemption, and they survive amidst the hellish dances of fire. Coleridge, in "Religious Musings" sings: "by sacred sympathy might make / The whole one Self! Self, that no alien knows! / Self, far diffused as Fancy's wings can travel!" (PW 1912: 115). Nature offers the means for the Mariner's redemption which, also, requires the Mariner's realization of the 'One Life' running through all creatures; a realization of the divinely bond among all natural creatures.

The unity referred to here seems to be transcendental. Thus, the Mariner needs love to become alive again. The "spring of love" that "gushes from [his] heart" is, according to Appleyard, "a dynamic and voluntary exchange between man and God, or at least an active sympathy with mind and order in existence" (1965: 45). Only after praising the beauty of water snakes shining in the moonlight can the Mariner pray; only after he loves Nature, is the curse removed. The praise reestablishes the faith in the unity of all creatures, and Nature rewards the Mariner's faith by sending rain, sleep, the wind and 'the Polar Spirit' to move the ship home.

Natural imagery is an undistinguishable part of romantic poetry where the poet projects his inner feelings upon the external world. According to Finkelstein “a literary description, like a painted one, is no simple enumeration of data but a human involvement with Nature or the outside world. Thus it embodies, by implication, a human portrait, or state of human life” (1967: 165). The Mariner says “I had killed the bird / That made the breeze to blow” (ll. 91-92) and “I had killed the bird / That brought the fog and mist” (ll. 97-98). In “Frost at Midnight,” Coleridge addresses his baby boy:

But thou, my babe! Shalt wonder like a breeze

By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags

Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds. (Richards 1971: 129)

The albatross is associated with the moon—the moon has the whole ocean under her spell and power—the mist, imagination, joy, order and benevolence. The moonlight brings blessing and transition with herself and it is the moon that helps the Mariner notice the beauty of water snakes and repair the bond. It acts as a reminder of both the beauty and the unity of all creatures. Williams relates the moon “like the water [...] to mother and the female” (1999: 244). Even before the water snakes, it is the beauty of the moon and the stars that heralds the arrival of faith, joy, peace, unity and order:

The moving Moon went up the sky,

And no where did abide:

Softly she was going up,

And a star or two beside. (4. 263-266)

House, beautifully, refers to the function of such heavenly bodies as the moon and the stars to be “not merely to image the Mariner’s spiritual states [...] but also to provide in the narrative structure of the poem the link between the Mariner as ordinary man, and the Mariner as one acquainted with the invisible world” (1964: 174). Though not against the colonial practices of socio-cultural exchange, Coleridge shows that harmony is restored by Nature just when the ship heads back to England rather than continuing her exploration of more Oriental and virgin lands. It is interesting to note that Coleridge knew how much cross-cultural interactions meant to British economy on the one hand, and desired a disentanglement from the Orient on the other.

Coleridge was afraid of sugar as a colonial product however, it was fear of Nature that made him a different Coleridge from the one passionately in thought of founding his utopian pantisocratic community in the virgin lands of America to which he desired an extensive voyage of discovery and cultural mission.

## Conclusion

Coleridge's gaze and consciousness have made his *The Rime* a means of perception of life where there exists no isolated being: a companionship violated by betrayal of the 'One Life,' the portrait of an inimical world, and the repair of the divinely bond. This could all happen in the Mariner's 'primary imagination' that perceives the world, and the 'secondary' that both affirms and creates the unity of all worldly creatures. An ecocritical reading of the poem lays emphasis on Nature's punishment and reward of the Mariner's shooting the albatross (betrayal), and praising water snakes (companionship) respectively. The Mariner who disrupts ties with Nature suffers a 'period of doubt and despair' in a cold and hostile world rather than a benign one inspiring him with joy and peace.

The Mariner, partially purged by the hermit symbolizing redemption, tries to convey his experience of mutual survival to the Wedding-Guest as a likely colonizer of wild lands, and inform him of the fact that man and Nature need each other for survival. This is the spiritual regeneration that Coleridge creates in his readers. The poem offers no resolution although "the Mariner shows he is both healed and forgiven by worshipping at peace and harmony with his fellows" (Prickett 1975: 25). The Mariner's life remains a failure, for according to Deepak Kumar, "colonization" is "exploration and exploitation" (1990: 51) which suggests that exploitation of other peoples and foreign lands can result in war that itself destroys both man and Nature, and the bond between the two. Sailors returning home from either war or voyages of discovery could no longer enjoy their former domestic happiness which is why Coleridge, in *The Rime*, intended to put "the marvelous and supernatural [...] beside the incidents of everyday life to uphold a single universal morality" (Prickett 1975: 24).

Although the divine bond is partially repaired and the Mariner partially purged, the damages by the violation cannot be fully recovered which shows Coleridge's uncertainty concerning the slave trade and the exploration of foreign lands. Bloom refers to "a magical quest-pattern" in the poem "which intends as its goal a reconciliation between the poet's self-consciousness and a higher order of being, associated with Divine forgiveness" (2005: 62). The "divine forgiveness" seems no guarantee for a perfect bond with Nature which is why the Mariner is a changed man at the end, and a cause of horror (to the Wedding-Guest) rather than peace and joy. To use Abdul R. Jan Mohamed's words, "negative aspects of the colonizer's psyche [are] transferred to the homogenized native subject in binary oppositions of self and other, white and black, civilization and savagery, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality" (as cited in Kitson 2000: 517) which implies that in the same way many aspects of the colonized are also transferred to the colonizer. Coleridge remains uncertain in his view of colonization and cross-cultural interactions with the East. Thus, he finds Nature an excellent ecocritical context to show what the aftermath of such transatlantic ideological voyages may be.



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