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> He holds him with his glittering eye—
> The Wedding-Guest stood still,
> And listens like a three years' child:
> The Mariner hath his will. (13-16)

Much like the curious Wedding-Guest, readers have been captivated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" for the past two centuries. Though "The Rime" has a fairy-tale like quality where it at times resembles a "nursery rhyme, with suggestion of hands clapping, elbows jerking in time, a fiddle playing perhaps, or a tin whistle or a child's drum" (Holmes 88), its language is also incredibly complex, and the narrative of the Mariner's crime and redemption seems to offer more to the reader than that of a children's poem. First published in a collaborative collection of poems by Coleridge and fellow poet William Wordsworth titled the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), "The Rime" offers all readers of any literary background, from the newly read child to the most advanced scholar of English literature, a vivid experience, one in which they come away from the poem possibly in the same manner as the Wedding-Guest: "sadder" and "wiser" (624).

Countless critics have courageously – and maybe vainly – attempted to explain the complexities of "The Rime," each offering their own interpretation of what the poem might be intending to depict. These interpretations range from those that are Christian-centered, in which the Mariner's journey is compared to the "Wanderings of Cain" or "The Wandering Jew," to readings that feel influenced by the contemporary historical moment, which argue, for example, that the tale describes the experience of PTSD, or that it is a piece of environmental political fiction that warns of the dangers of disturbing nature's tranquility. Through almost all of these

interpretations, scholars attempt to decipher "The Rime's" supposed themes, using their own logic to determine whether the poem has an overarching moral, and if it does, what that moral could be? Many critics find fault with the Mariner's final lesson regarding loving all of God's creatures and argue whether it is critical to understand the poem as a religious or historical allegory or whether to take "The Rime" for the creative piece that it is. With the addition of the gloss in 1817, Coleridge himself seems to have welcomed the idea that the poem needs to be explained and interpreted. That said, are the many interpretations of the poem correct, or at least defendable? Or does the poem laugh at our attempts to understand its mysteries?

In this thesis, I will first provide a brief account of the poem's many incarnations during Coleridge's lifetime by tracking its textual history. I will then move to a review of its critical reception history from its first publication in 1798 to the present day. By traversing through the long textual and critical reception history of the poem, one may find that each new interpretation they encounter throughout the thesis is valid in its own right, marking its own place in the wide range of ideas one may have regarding why Coleridge intended to create the story of "The Rime." With this idea in mind, all of this work will set me up to add my own interpretation of the Mariner's tale wherein I will argue that the poem – and its many incarnations –mimic the process typical of the oral literary tradition, in which an oral text, and the understanding of its moral, continuously adapts to whatever culture encounters it.

Textual History of the Rime of the Ancient Mariner

Wordsworth's nephew, George Wordsworth, records, the year before "The Rime's" original publication in 1798, Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy, strolled from Alfoxden to Linton and the Valley of Stones in England with the intention of creating, or

contemplating some ideas for, a literary piece. The three were low on funds and intended to create a poem that they could publish in the *New Monthly Magazine*, a British literary periodical, which would bring in some income. Coleridge introduced the group to the Ancient Mariner, a character from a dream of Coleridge's companion, George Cruikshank. Wordsworth credits the entirety of the poem to Coleridge but for three distinct ideas: 1) Wordsworth suggested that the crime of the story involve the killing of an Albatross; 2) he suggested that the ship be navigated by the dead shipmates; and 3) he came up with two lines about the Wedding Guest as an auditor: "And listens like a three years' child: / The Mariner hath his will" (Coleridge lines 15-16).

Wordsworth's suggestion to include the Albatross is particularly interesting when thinking about the textual history of the poem. In 1726, a captain by the name of George Shelvocke wrote "A Voyage Around the World By Way of the Great South Sea," a narrative detailing his journey to the bottom of the South American continent. In this narrative, Shelvocke details the events that took place during an altercation with an Albatross:

> [N]or one Sea-bird except a disconsolate black Albatross, who accompanied us for several days, hovering about us as if he had lost himself, till Hartley, (my second Captain) observing in one of his melancholy fits … that it might be some ill omen. That which, I suppose, induced in him the more to encourage his superstition [concerning] the continued series of contrary tempestuous winds, which had oppressed us ever since we had got in the sea...he, after some fruitless attempts, at length, shot the Albatross, not doubting 'perhaps' that we should have a fine wind after it … (19)

Possibly as a passing remembrance, Wordsworth mentions this passage to Coleridge as a guide for how Coleridge could place the Albatross in "The Rime." Another travel narrative written about the experiences of Captain James Cook's may have also influenced the poem as well. Luke Strongman writes,

> Biographical evidence is provided by Bernard Smith's account of the conversational influence of William Wales upon Coleridge as a schoolboy. Wales was astronomer and

> meteorologist onboard Cook's Resolution in 1772 and later a mathematics master at Christ's Hospital during Coleridge's time at the school. It would be natural that Wales would have regaled his young and impressionable pupils with stories about his voyage in the southern seas onboard the ship. (75)

Along with these accounts from his teacher, Coleridge also would have read the journals of Joseph Banks, another man who traveled with Cook as a naturalist. Banks states that on board Cook's ship, there were many killings of albatrosses for scientific purposes. These various texts surely provided Coleridge with some practical and real-world knowledge for the ways in which he could position the Albatross in his poem.

Along with these nautical accounts, Coleridge had another influence for his poem, the supernatural, which he wrote about in *Biographia Literaria*, a loose autobiography written in 1817. In the paragraph below, Coleridge details his and Wordsworth's creative objectives when they began their work on the *Lyrical Ballads*:

> In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in this sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such, as will be found in every village and its vicinity, where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them, when they present themselves. (Gettman 42)

The poets intended to create works with realistic characters who face challenging and supernatural events, which came to fruition with the Ancient Mariner. The utilization of the nautical world, especially with the combination of the journals of Captain Shelvocke and Captain Cook, takes readers into an environment they most likely have never experienced before. The arctic was a documented place, one that was slowly becoming uncovered by explorers and scientists, but still wasn't entirely known to the English-speaking world, which granted

Coleridge a unique opportunity to use a real-life setting, although one almost completely unknown to the common man, while still suggesting something unworldly and thus uncanny. Katherine Bowers describes why this setting was so ripe for a supernatural treatment: "The explorers perceive the unfamiliar frozen landscape in terms of absence; for them, ice and snow becomes simply blankness, a liminal space with supernatural potential" (4). Bowers claims that the polar characteristics of the nautical story, "extreme weather, harsh climate, ice and snow, poor visibility, creaking ship sounds, an eerie, muffled silence," create a terrifying atmosphere, which Coleridge exploits in order to create a realistic supernatural world in which the Mariner must deal with the uncanny when he commits the crime of killing the Albatross (6).

According to Jack Stillinger, Coleridge wrote the poem between November 1797 to March 1798 and published it in the *Lyrical Ballads* seven months later in October of 1798. The poem opened the collection. There are many distinct features of this first publication. For one, Coleridge used archaic language in the first rendering of the poem. For example, the poem's first title was "The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, in Seven Parts" (Stillinger 61). Throughout the text, Coleridge uses similar archaic language; Wordsworth claims that the poem was in "imitation of the style, as well as the spirit of the elder poets" (Stillinger 61). The 1798 version of the poem also contained the first Argument, a brief summary of the poem found at its beginning: "How a Ship having passed the Line was driven by Storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancyent Marinere came back to his own Country" (Coleridge 370).

Coleridge was drawn to the styles of older poets, as Wordsworth suggests above, in which he states that Coleridge was influenced by these bygone writers, which may be why

Coleridge included the archaic language and the Argument in the poem's initial publication. Along with these narrative and language choices, Coleridge also chose to write "The Rime" in the form of a ballad. Moreover, to keep the archaic characterization of the poem, Coleridge utilized the form of the folk ballad as explained by Richard Holmes: "The Mariner draws powerfully on the old ballad tradition of using supernatural events, spirits and visions as if they were the norm of human experience" (89). Older ballads were created by traveling minstrels in the medieval period and tend to focus on a central emotional story, using repetition and a sing-song quality to entertain audiences. "The Rime" fits into this definition of the traditional ballad, which Coleridge intended to mimic.

One would assume that when an author has completed the writing process of a certain creative piece culminating in its eventual publication that the literary work must be in its optimal state and the writer would then move on to their next creative endeavor. However, Coleridge never allowed the Mariner to continue his penance onwards and tell his story to the next unlikely listener. Instead, he revised the poem on numerous occasions. Stillinger counted eighteen known revisions of "The Rime," leading up to Coleridge's death. According to Stillinger, over the course of these revisions, Coleridge removed approximately sixty lines and added twenty, changed the opening Argument, altered the title of the poem, added a marginal gloss, discarded the Argument for epigraph by Thomas Burnet, removed the archaic language, and revised some modern language that he did not find to his liking. Though there are 18 published or manuscript versions, I will only discuss four of these—the 1798 (the initial version, which I discuss above), the 1800 (the fourth), 1802 (the fifth), and the 1817 (the eighth)—because they contain some of the most significant information relating to the textual history of "The Rime." I discussed the first version because it is the first written and provides the skeletal frame that Coleridge will keep

returning to in the following revisions. The remaining three harbor significant changes to "The Rime" that alter the perspective of the poem upon the readers' minds regarding how the poem may be understood.

The fourth version of "The Rime," revised in 1800, was the second published version, appearing in the second volume of the *Lyrical Ballads*. In this edition, "The Rime" is no longer the first piece of the collection but becomes the penultimate one. Moreover, the archaic language is discarded throughout the poem. The title of "The Rime" also loses its archaisms which at this point became "The Ancient Mariner, A Poet's Reverie." According to Stillinger, the altered title added some context to the work as a whole: "The new title in 1800, 'The Ancient Mariner, A Poet's Reverie,' calls attention, first on a separate half-title and again at the beginning of the poem, to the fact that, reverie or not, this is a work of artistic composition, by a poet, and not just (as it could have seemed in 1798) the recorded loose talk of a wild-eyed old seafarer" (69). In other words, the added title of "Reverie" added more esteem to the piece then what might have been assumed of "The Rime" in the first version because the poem would no longer seem to be the ramblings of a deranged Mariner but the creative genius of a sophisticated poet. J. C. C. Mays suggests Wordsworth and Coleridge spoke about this addition so that they might connect the story back to their initial intentions, which was supposed to contain themes of the supernatural, dream-like world, which the term "reverie" suggests as explained from this quote by Edward E. Bostetter: "'Reverie' meant for Coleridge a waking dream in which the mind though remaining aware relaxed its monitoring and allowed the imagination to roam freely in a 'streamy' process of association" (249). The title of "Reverie" then brought back the focus of the poem to the original creative objectives of the *Lyrical Ballads* as a collection of sophisticated supernatural literary pieces.

The Argument in the fourth version changed as well. The Argument in the first version, which I discussed above, focuses on the geographical locations mentioned in "The Rime." The Argument in the 1800 text shifts the focus to moral aspects of the poem: "How a Ship, having first sailed to the Equator, was driven by Storms, to the cold Country towards the South Pole; how the Ancient Mariner cruelly, and in contempt of the laws of hospitality, killed a Sea-bird; and how he was followed by many and strange Judgements; and in what manner he came back to his own Country" (Coleridge 509). The first Argument merely lists the major geographical points that the Mariner will travel to throughout "The Rime." The revised Argument alters how the reader will view the poem before they begin the tale, forcing them to consider the morality of the adventure, rather than the story itself. For example, the 1800 version's Argument adds words and phrases such as "in contempt of the laws" and "judgments" to indicate that "The Rime" is now about the crime and penance of the Mariner rather than the overall narrative. Due to its intended focus on morality, the altered Argument counters any surprise of the events to unfold in the poem but rather tells the reader exactly what to expect as far as major plot points go. Also, the second Argument forces a moral onto the poem that many readers may not have easily intuited from their own reading experience.

The 1800 text also includes some major changes, such as the substitution of certain phrases and words as well as the deletion and addition of stanzas. The final major change to the poem is that Coleridge receives no direct credit for his work. In this version, Wordsworth names himself as author of the *Lyrical Ballads* but only labels Coleridge as "a friend." The first version of the collection had no names attached, and the addition of Wordsworth's name and the absence of Coleridge's in the second displays the control Wordsworth's felt that he had over the entirety of the volume.

We find Coleridge tinkering with the poem again in the 1802 publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (which again does not credit him as the author). Although this text does not have as many edits as the previous edition, it does contain two edits that are important to mention in the poem's textual history. The first was the loss of the Argument, which leaves "The Rime" with no opening for the readers to gauge what the poem may be about but continues right to the Mariner's entry into the Wedding Feast. The second alteration was the deletion of the second part of the title: "A Poet's Reverie." Stillinger believes the loss of the subtitle was due to Charles Lamb, a famous English essayist, and his complaint regarding the subtitle's addition of "A Poet's Reverie" in the 1800 version: "I am sorry that Coleridge has christened his Ancient Marinere 'a poet's Reverie'—it is as bad as Bottom the Weaver's declaration that he is not a Lion but only the scenical representation of a Lion. What new idea is gained by this Title, but one subversive of all credit, which the Tale should force upon us, of its truth?" (64). Lamb was not pleased with how the subtitle smooths over the poem's strangeness, "[a]s if to suggest that its arbitrariness lies in the poet's mind rather than in the world he alludes to" (Miall 637). Lamb stated the addition and idea of dreaminess was "subversive" to the truth of the poem, in some sense undermining the poem's greatness. It could be conjectured that Lamb did not want to believe that the poem had no meaning but had more to it than what the subtitle, "The Poet's Reverie," suggested.

The final version Coleridge edited that it is important to the textual history is the eighth, published in 1817 in the fifth edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. This version of "The Rime" is the one most often read and has become standard in many anthologies, textbooks, *et cetera*. For the first time since its initial publication 20 years before, Coleridge is credited as the author. Along with the accreditation, Coleridge brings back the original title "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, In Seven Parts," but does not bring back the archaic language in the title as was included in the

poem's first publication. Coleridge also includes in this edition a Latin epigraph, replacing the Argument that was present in the 1798 and 1800 versions of the poem. The epigraph was written in Latin by Thomas Burnett in the late seventeenth century in his work *Archaeologiae Philosophica*. Richard Mead and Thomas Foxton translated the epigraph as such:

> I can easily believe, that there are more Invisible than Visible Beings in the Universe; but who will declare to us the Family of all these, and acquaint us with the Agreements, Differences, and peculiar Talents which are to be found among them? It is true, human Wit has always desired a Knowledge of these Things, though it has never yet attained it. I will own that it is very profitable, sometimes to contemplate in the Mind, as in a Draught, the Image of the greater and better World; lest the Soul being accustomed to the Trifles of this present Life, should contract itself too much, and altogether rest in mean Cogitation; but in the mean Time, we must take Care to keep the Truth, and observe Moderation, that we may distinguish certain from uncertain Things, and Day from Night. (Mays 371)

As Mays suggests, Coleridge rebels against Wordsworth's wishes with this addition: "the epigraph makes emphatically clear what Wordsworth clearly resisted in Coleridge's speculations on the supernatural" (128). In a note in the 1800 version of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth calls attention to what he deems to be "defects" in "The Rime," one being, "that the principal person has no distinct character, either in his profession of Mariner, or as a human being who having been long under the control of supernatural impressions might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural," and, "that the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other" (46). Coleridge utilizes Burnett's epigraph in order to emphasize his own objectives in writing "The Rime." Though still honoring the original creative objectives he had laid out with Wordsworth, Coleridge felt as though Wordsworth's strict criticisms regarding the incoherent nature and strangeness of the poem did not align with how Coleridge desired to discuss the supernatural in his own work. In fact, as the epigraph suggests, Coleridge calls into question those who do not think upon the supernatural world, who may become petty beings, only focused on themselves. The epigraph then emphasizes for readers to embrace the

strangeness of engaging with a supernatural world which Wordsworth seemed to want Coleridge to do away with.

The most substantial change in the 1817 version of the poem is the addition of the marginal gloss. The gloss is represented in the margins of "The Rime" and totals 58 paragraphs which seems to either summarize or moralize the events taking place in the stanzas relatively next to the gloss paragraph. Wendy Wall writes on the influence of the gloss on critics and readers alike: "The doubled form of the poem, that of verse and gloss, creates a labyrinthine reading experience which accentuates the act of interpretation by probing the problematical relationship between not only discourse and experience, but also between interacting discourses as critiques of one another" (179). Though there has been much debate regarding the gloss (for example why Coleridge added it in the first place and what he hoped to gain by including the gloss), all critics agree that the gloss completely changed the perspective of the poem for readers and added a new layer of interpretation for critics to discuss. I will examine the different interpretations of the gloss later in the critical reception history.

Two more significant parts of the poem's textual history are the inclusion of illustrations as well as the many translations of "The Rime." Surely, the most important illustrated version of "The Rime" is that of French artist Gustave Dore's edition in 1876, which contributed to the wild success of the poem after Coleridge's death. Other artists, such as Andre Lhote in 1920, Mario Prassinos in I946, and Andre Masson in 1948, all employed varying styles, such as Cubism and Surrealism, to illustrate the text. Martin Gardner's illustrated American edition in *The Annotated Ancient Mariner*, as Gilles Soubigou suggests, contributed to "The Rime's" revival post – World War II.

Along with the illustrations of the poem, the many translations found throughout Europe contributed to "The Rime's" growing popularity. "The Rime" was introduced in France by a plagiarizer, Henri de Latouche, who passed his translation of the poem off as his own creation. However, he was eventually caught. According to Michael John Kooy, author of the article "Coleridge's Early Reception in France, from the First to the Second Empire," the best known French translation in the nineteenth century was by Alfred Young, an Anglophile. In Germany, according to Frederick Barwick, who wrote about "The Rime's" reception in the European country, the best German translation was Ferdinand Frelilgrath's, published in 1831. Frelilgrath was dedicated to introducing and popularizing Coleridge's poetry to German public and gladly succeeded in his attempts. Other countries such as Spain, Poland, Italy, *etc*. would all come to adapt their own translations of "The Rime." The last countries to publish their own translations were Poland and Russia, which were published in the late 1800's and spread the knowledge of Coleridge's "The Rime" into Eastern Europe. Coleridge now has become a beloved and well-known poet, allowing the Albatross to spread its wings over the Europeans nations as well as in the United States.

Though the translation and illustrative history is quite interesting, the main focus of this essay is on the English text and how it has been interpreted over time by scholars. Therefore, to understand the text more deeply outside of only a reader's pass, we must begin considering the span of interpretive essays regarding the poem and its author.

Critical Reception History

Similar to the complex and expansive textual history of "The Rime," the critical reception history is just as complicated and formidable. Since its original publication, a plethora of

scholars have attempted to tackle the poem's labyrinth storyline along with Coleridge's rich vocabulary and composition. Non-academics and scholars alike, through reviews and essays, attempt to grapple with the poem's majesty and develop a wide range of theories and scholarship regarding the poem's illusory narrative. One can conclude from the seemingly endless amount of criticism that "The Rime" is not a poem to be easily understood.

Many scholars have sought to make sense of the poem from their own studied viewpoints. However, very few scholars attempted scholarly examination of the poem while Coleridge remained alive. When "The Rime" was first published, it was coldly brushed off by the literary establishment. As Richard Haven explains: "Critics treated 'The Ancient Mariner' first with coolness and then, for some years, with neglect" (364). However, Mays states that the poem appealed to the general public: "The 'Mariner's' fame was part-notoriety—it was too varied to be easily summarized and not long enough to be considered a major statement— and so, without much official approval or understanding, it slipped easily into the public repertoire" (141).

However, though the literary community did not find the piece worth much scholarly attention, many were unabashed in sharing their own opinions regarding the piece. Positive reviews came from such figures as Wordsworth's author friend Francis Wrangham who enjoyed Coleridge's poem and stated it was "admirable" (Haven 365). Anna Seward, a famous English poet, commented that the poem was "a great quiz of composition I ever met with" (Haven 366). The Naval Chronicle enjoyed the novel's superstitious renderings calling it "the weed of a religious mind" (Haven 365). On the other hand, other critics did not find "The Rime" so pleasing. Mrs. Barbauld, a poet and literary critic, had supposedly told Coleridge that she found two major problems with the "The Rime:" "It was improbable and had no moral" (Gettman 66).

Charles Burney, a reviewer for the *Monthly Review*, called it a "rhapsody of unintelligible wildness and incoherence" (Haven 365). In the *Critical Review*, Robert Southey, a poet, stated he could not understand the story and, in private called the poem "nonsense" (Haven 365). However, though there were many opinions regarding the poem's quality, the poem somehow fell into obscurity until quarter of a century later.

Two years after Coleridge's death in 1834, Charles Tilt, a famous London bookseller, produced a short volume of Coleridge's works which was became the first volume of his poems to include "The Rime." Due to the small pocket-sized edition of the work and its consequent low cost, its popularity began to skyrocket. Illustrators, the most famous being Gustave Dore as mentioned above, also brought more success for "The Rime." The poem began being marketed towards children in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Mays states that this targeted marketing began because the poem "was long but not too long, attractive to children but with 'difficulties' to explain and be comprehended, with a moral that could be pointed to and argued for, that could support pictures to make a book for lessons into a book for birthdays" (146). Moreover, according to Mays, in 1861 "Thomas Shorter, secretary of the Working Man's College, after including a few Coleridge pieces in a selection 'for School and Home' in 1861, appears to have been the first to include the full text of the 'Mariner' (minus gloss) in a much larger school selection published later that same year and many times reprinted" (145). With the growing popularity of the poem with children and the inclusion of the poem into the literary curriculum of most primary schools in England, "The Rime" was on its way to becoming a classic piece of literature that students continue to study in classrooms today.

As Mays stated in the paragraph above regarding the relationship with the public and with scholars, the public seemed to enjoy the poem at least 70 years before the scholars began to

take notice of its literary genius. The poem's assumed simplicity, due to the fact that it was viewed as a children's poem, blocked many scholars from viewing the poem as one worth their attention. Though few in number, there were a handful of literary critics during Coleridge's time who interpreted the poem, the most famous being John Gibson Lockhart, but most of these interpretations viewed the poem as a religious allegory. However, because "The Rime" never left the public's repertoire, scholars began to take notice of the poem's complex nature in the 20th century. Around a century after Coleridge's death, the first major piece of literary criticism regarding "The Rime" was published: John Livingston Lowes' *The Road to Xanadu*. Lowes published his book in 1927 and it traverses what Lowes believes would have been the texts and thoughts that would have influenced Coleridge's writing of "The Rime." However, what is most interesting for my purpose as relates to the critical reception history of the poem is Lowes' ideas on the moral of the poem.

Lowes claims that "to interpret the drift of the Ancient Mariner as didactic in its intention is to stultify both Coleridge and one's self!" (299). Lowes believed that "The Rime" was only a work of Coleridge's imagination and that Coleridge had no intention for the poem to have a moral or to have readers obtain a moral from it. Lowes finds it trivial for any reader to look deeper into the meaning of the poem. Readers must take the piece for what it is: a fantastic work of pure fiction. As regards to the moral as written at the end of the poem, Lowes does not believe that it could hold outside of "The Rime:" "For the 'moral' of the poem, outside the poem, will not hold water. It is valid only within the magic circle" (Gettman 67). Lowes explains that the moral does not fit in with our current standards of justice:

> The punishment, measured by the standards of a world of balanced penalties, palpably does not fit the crime. But the sphere of balanced penalties is not the given world in which the poem moves. Within that world, where birds have tutelary daemons and ships

> are driven by spectral and angelic powers, consequence and antecedent are in keeping – if for the poet's moment we accept the poet's premises (Gettman 68).

As Lowes states, the consequences do not match the actions found in the poem. For example, in our current system of justice, one would find fault with others dying for the actions of another man, such as the entirety of the crew dying when it was the Mariner who committed the act of murder. Therefore, readers should not uphold the Mariner's moral to our society's standards because it, like everything else in this poem, is not meant for our reality but for the reality of the poem.

Another scholar to speak on the moral is Irving Babbitt who wrote about "The Rime" in 1929 in his book *On Being Creative and Other Essays*. Similar to Lowes, Babbitt does not believe that "The Rime" has any ethical implication: "The fact is that it is impossible to extract any serious ethical import from *The Ancient Mariner*" (70). However, unlike Lowes, his reasoning for making this argument differs:

> Moreover, this moral, unexceptionable in itself, turns out, when taken in its context, to be a sham moral. The mode in which the Mariner is relieved of the burden of his transgression, symbolized by the Albatross hung around his neck – namely, by admiring the color of water-snakes – is an extreme example of a confusion to which I have already alluded: he obtains subrationally and unconsciously the equivalent of Christian charity … The poem thus lays claim to a religious seriousness that at bottom it does not possess (71).

Babbitt argues that the way in which the Mariner eventually gains his freedom from the torments of his crime, by blessing the water-snakes, is a rash attempt at including a Christian message that in all other parts of the poem does not exist. Therefore, the moral is a "sham" – or one crudely tacked on – as it relates to the poem.

As I discussed earlier, Coleridge's gloss, added in the 1817 edition of the poem, seems to go out of its way to provide the moral that Lowes and Babbitt claims is inoperative, but the early 20th-century critics who focused on it found it to be lacking as well. In 1932, B.R. McElderry Jr.

wrote an essay about the gloss Coleridge added to the poem. As he and many other scholars believe, the gloss seems to convolute the poem's meaning: "But I do not believe many readers, even alert and thoughtful ones, would make the connection from the text itself" (146). Because McElderry believe that the gloss adds meaning to the poem where the supposed meaning cannot be found, he believes Coleridge has "create[d] an impression that the text is inadequate; the gloss tells the incident better because it gives a closer connection between events" (146). Whether Coleridge added the gloss because he felt the text was in fact inadequate and intended to add a prose reading to uncomplicate the text or, as some scholars suppose, to spite those who stated their confusion to the poem and, by doing so, added an easy yet flawed interpretation, we may never know.

McElderry also connects the gloss to the intended moral: "The moral relationship may or may not have been definite in Coleridge's mind before the gloss was added, but it is certainly more empathetic in the reader's mind after the gloss is read" (147). The gloss does add more to the intended morality of the poem because the gloss tends to moralize some of the stanzas in "The Rime" (some which may not have needed to be moralized at all). For example, when the crew members make excuses for the Mariner after he kills the Albatross, the poem states:

> Then all averred, I had killed the bird
> That brought the fog and mist.
> 'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
> That bring the fog and mist. (99-102)

The gloss then states: "But when the fog cleared off, they justify the same, and thus make themselves accomplices of the crime" (381). After reading these four lines, it would be a stretch to assume that readers would easily be able to gather this gloss statement from the actual text

itself. The gloss adds to the text what is not apparent in the lines adjacent to it. Therefore, it acts as a prose rendering that does not adhere to the poetry of "The Rime." The end result is more confusion.

In the same year, 1932, an essay by Newton P. Stallknecht returns to the vexed question about the poem's moral or absence thereof. Stallknecht believes that the poem does have a moral: "The moral is not woven very closely into the narrative, it may even be superfluous in the esthetic structure; but it is there none the less, although not so obvious to the reader as Coleridge may have supposed" (559). According to Stallknecht, though there is a moral readers can gain from the poem, the supposed moral found at the end of the poem seems a bit ludicrous: "But certainly Coleridge had a sense of the ridiculous which would have withheld him from writing a phantasy of some six hundred lines on the danger of cruelty to animals" (560). Many readers and scholars alike agree that the ending moral, that one must be kind to all God's creatures, does not fit within the entire narrative told to us and thus feels out of place.

In the following year, 1933, Elizabeth Nitchie wrote an essay "reconsidering" the moral on "The Rime." While reflecting on other critics' points of view regarding the poem, she adds, "Like a child [the Mariner] suffers out of all proportion to the deed when made to feel that the deed is outrageous. All the punishment is thus interpreted as a figment of the Mariner's own imagination, inflamed by a guilty conscience and the accusations of his companions" (871). This thought pattern relating to the outrageousness of the punishment may be why children relate to this poem. The consequences the Mariner faces because of his actions in "The Rime" are excessive compared to the actual crime. Many children might feel similar about their own punishments received for their bad deeds, making the poem easily digestible for them while adults might have a harder time understanding why the Mariner would have such a horrific

punishment. She also relates the moral to that of a nightmare stating, “So the ‘moral’ of the Ancient Mariner proves to be a simple expression of the effect which a horrible dream experience had upon Mariner and Wedding-Guest, of the very natural resultant waking wisdom” (876). Most, if not all readers, find the poem to be of the dream-like quality Nitchie claims. As have been done for centuries, the moral may be the Mariner’s attempt to interpret his dream, or nightmare. Both of Nitchie’s statements express just how strange the moral judgment of the poem relates to the entirety of the narrative.

The influence of the Freudian interest in dreams led to more and more psychological interpretations as the twentieth century went on. D.W. Harding was one of the first scholars to speak on the psychological aspects of the poem and those related to the Mariner himself, speaking on the Mariner’s possible depression: “It is the nadir of depression to which the earlier stanzas sink; the rest of the poem describes what is in part recovery and in part aftermath” (77). Harding associates the confusing morality of the poem to the feelings of depression: “A usual feature of these states of pathological misery is their apparent causelessness. The depression cannot be rationally explained; the conviction of the guilt and worthlessness is out of proportion to any ordinary offence actually committed” (78). Similar to Stallknecht and Nitchie’s interpretations, Harding argues that the penance the Mariner must pay does not align with the crime the Mariner committed. For many sufferers of depression, their own mental anguish also acts as a similar obscene punishment. For Harding, the killing of the Albatross is the ultimate sin for Coleridge because the Mariner “wantonly obliterated something which loved him and which represented in a supernatural way the possibility of affection in the world” (78). Because of this sin, The Mariner is left with no possibility of a full recovery and is forced to suffer the same rejection that the Mariner had for the Albatross: “The albatross is killed, and then the penalty

must be paid in remorse, dejection, and the sense of being a worthless outcast. Only a partial recovery is possible" (82). Similar to those who face depression, recovery is uncertain, and the somber feelings may linger for years without any hope that they will entirely diminish, which the Mariner may be experiencing after his voyage.

The next milestone in the critical history of "The Rime" was Robert Penn Warren's 1946 study about the primary and secondary themes found in the poem. For Warren, the primary theme is that of the "One Life:" "The theme of the 'One Life,' of the sacramental vision, is essentially religious – it presents us with the world, as the crew of the ship, are presented with the Albatross, in 'God's name'" (125). He explains the poem's ties to religion:

> We must remember that the crime, to maintain its symbolic reference to the Fall, must be motiveless. But the motiveless murder of a man would truly raise the issue of probability. Furthermore, the literal shock of such an act, especially if perverse and unmotivated, would be so great that it would distract from the symbolic significance. The poet's problem, then, was to provide an act which, on one hand, would not accent the issue of probability or shockingly distract from the symbolic significance, but which, on the other hand, would be adequately criminal to justify the consequences. And the necessary criminality is established, we have seen, in two ways (1) by making the gravity of the act depend on the state of the will which prompts it, and (2) by symbolically defining the bird as a "Christian soul" as "pious", etc. (115-116)

The Albatross is considered by the Mariner and his crew to be similar to that of a "Christian soul," directly relating the bird to the Christian God. When the Albatross is eventually killed wantonly, the poem then becomes a symbolic tale of "The Fall," according to Penn Warren, and one is able to see the connection to Christian ideology because the death of the Albatross represents some sort of strike against religion and God's beings. Penn Warren also speaks on the popular belief that the acts of redemption happen under the light of the moon and the acts of punishment happen under the light of the sun. He argues that the moon relates to that of the second theme of the poem, which is that of the imagination: Warren explains, "On the other hand, the theme of the imagination is essentially aesthetic – it presents us with the 'great forms'

of nature, but those forms as actively seized upon by the human mind and loved not merely as vehicles for transcendental meaning but in themselves as participating in the reality which they 'render intelligible'" (125). The bird, the moon, the wind, and the polar spirit all are a part of what Penn Warren claims is a symbolic cluster of the imagination, a force of nature that is to be loved. When the Mariner kills the bird, the act is a kind of violence against the imagination. The Polar Spirit is the being in the imagination theme that eventually aids the Mariner in returning to his homeland while the Angels are the beings in the "One Life" theme that help the Mariner. The Angels, who come near the end of the poem to guide the Mariner back to his home by entering the dead crew men's bodies, relate to the "One Life" as Warren explains, "Certainly, in the reanimation of the bodies of the fellow mariners, there is implicit the idea of regeneration and resurrection" (123). Through the two themes, the Mariner is able to understand the final moral of the poem, that one should honor God and his creation.

The coherence of Penn Warren's New Critical reading did not hold sway, however, as soon thereafter, critics continue asserting that the poem was riddling above all else. In 1947, George Whalley wrote about the "haunting quality" of the poem, forcing itself in a corner of the reader's minds to fester:

> Without in any way detracting from the value of The Rime as a poem, I wish to show that the 'haunting quality' grows from our intimate experience in the poem of the most intense personal suffering, perplexity, loneliness, longing, horror, fear. This experience brings us, with Coleridge, to the fringes of madness and death, and carries us to that nightmare land that Coleridge inhabited, the realm of Life-in-Death. There is no other single poem in which we come so close to the fullness of his innermost suffering (382).

According to Whalley, "The Rime" is a personal story that relates to Coleridge's own experience as he delves into depths of the horrors of his mind, contemplating on various unpleasant experiences in his life, such as an opium addiction and a failed marriage. Coleridge intended to

make use of his own sufferings to create a chilling story that would slyly and creepily linger in readers' minds.

A longer piece on "The Rime" was written by Humphrey House from 1951 to 1952. He begins his lecture on the poem speaking on the two main figures constantly alluded to as influences for the Mariner's character: Cain from the bible and The Wandering Jew (the Wandering Jew is a mythological figure in 13th century England; I will discuss The Wandering Jew in a later paragraph.) House exclaims that the themes of "terrible guilt, suffering, expiation and wandering" in the story of Cain are found heavily in the story of "The Rime" (149). House also ties the poem to a Christian allegory: "Across this whole system of daemons of the elements and angelic spirits lies the framework of ordinary Catholic theology — Christ and Mary Queen of Heaven, and in the ending the ordinary Catholic practices of confession, absolution and church-going" (153).The possibility of this being a Christian poem has caused a divide in the literary community. Some scholars believe "The Rime" is tied directly to the Christian faith while others believe the religious aspects feel tacked on.

House also references the moral: "Now this story has not got a 'moral' in the sense that there is a clear explicit detachable maxim which neatly sums up the didactic drift of it. But it seems equally clear that one cannot possibly read the story without being very aware of moral issues in it; aware that its whole development is governed by moral situations, and that without them there wouldn't really be a story" (153). This quote relates to the sentiments of many other critics I have spoken on in previous paragraphs: though there is a sense of morality in the poem, the supposed moral cannot be easily gained from one's reading of "The Rime."

Another very popular essayist regarding of Coleridge's "The Rime" was Edward E. Bostetter who, in 1962, wrote about the confusing nature of the isolated world in the poem.

Bostetter views the world of the Ancient Mariner as devastating and unforgiving: “The universe which is jarred into revealing itself by the Mariner’s act is a grim and forbidding one in which the punishment of violators is swift, severe, and sustained…He remains subject, like an Evangelical, to an unrelenting sense of guilt, the compulsion to confess, the uncertainty as to when if ever penance will end” (243-244). The Mariner has a swift and unrelenting punishment after his kills the Albatross, leading any reader to gape at the tenacious callousness of the universe the Mariner is a part of. However, as he and many other critics have pointed out, the punishment seems too harsh for the crime itself: “[The rulers of the universe] are revealed as holding the same contempt for human life that the Mariner held for the bird's life, by finding the crew equally guilty and deserving of the same punishment as the Mariner: whether they live or die depends upon the throw of the dice. The moral conception here is primitive and savage - utterly arbitrary in its ruthlessness” (245). By having two quite overruling and frightening creatures such as Death and Life-in-Death depend on chance to determine the punishment of the Mariner demonstrates just how quick, harsh, and unruly the world of the Mariner is. There are no standard rules or regulations for justice, just an eye for an eye dependent upon chance. Bostetter also speaks on the deity of this poem: “The God who loved man as well as bird should have been merciful and forgiving. The God of the poem, however, is a jealous God; and in context the moral tag carries the concealed threat that even the most trivial violation of his love will bring ruthless and prolonged punishment. The way to avoid conscious or unconscious sin is to withdraw from active life to humble ourselves in prayer” (247). To Bostetter, then, this poem is following more of the Great Awakening sermons of Jonathan Edwards, an American minister, who preached about the fear of God in the 1700s in order to encourage early Americans to attend

church. The universe and the God of the Ancient Mariner is cruel, and one must hope and pray that their punishment is swift and merciful.

In 1963, another scholar, Gayle S. Smith discussed the moral stanzas of "The Rime:" "Coleridge's poem is not a nonmoral adventure in dreamland, any more than it is 'a tract for the prevention of cruelty to albatrosses.' It is, instead, a vision of moral interrelationship in the cosmos" (43). For Smith, the Mariner's moral aligns more with the themes of imagination found in Warren's paper, about the importance of protecting and caring for nature. They also state that the moral of the narrative seem to be incomprehensible for not only the Mariner, but also the Wedding-Guest and the reader as well:

> [The moral stanzas] are spoken by the Mariner himself: but they do not embody the thoughts of the young Mariner to whom the experience first happened …the moral stanzas are offered to the reader as a kind of perspective upon a moral vision which neither he nor the Mariner need now gaze upon so close at hand …The one, to whom the sublime and terrifying vision is new, stumbles off 'stunned'; the other departs nodding his head, satisfied and benign. Neither has understood the experience, yet each has known it (50).

Though the Mariner attempts to make his own assumption about the moral he was intended to glean from his journey, the moral stanzas are only a proposed explanation meant to be an observation made by a single human regarding his experience who has little knowledge of the motivations of nature and the universe around him.

A year later, in 1964, Daniel McDonald discusses "The Rime" as an allegory representing any human's journey when exploring an unknown experience or place. McDonald states that similar to most individuals who find that as they age their friends begin to die, so does the Mariner: "As imponderable as the mysterious life force is the nature of death. The Mariner- like all men- finds himself subject to Death and to Life-in-Death. As with all men, his companions die around him and lie at his feet" (543). For McDonald, the poem is an allegory

regarding the plight that many, if not all, humans will face, where one ventures into adulthood experiencing the consequences of their own actions that they may not comprehend at first: "There he must acknowledge a reality, that many of his actions are not subject to the comprehensible dictates of induction and syllogism, but instead to strange forces of primitive impulse, guilt reaction, and dream manifestation" (545). Where McDonald differs from the previous scholars I have mentioned above is that, in McDonald's opinion, the punishment for the Mariner *does* fit the crime. He maintains that one misses the point of the poem by comparing the actual punishment to the crime when the real message is about growing up, and that one must eventually be punished; It's not about what punishment the Mariner received, but the fact that he received a punishment at all.

In the year 1969, O. Bryan Fulmer also focused on the Mariner as a journeyman by examining the relationship between the Mariner and the Wandering Jew. Fulmer believes that the entire narrative of "The Rime" and the character of the Mariner was structured around the myth of the Wandering Jew, a Jewish man who mocked Jesus on the way to his crucifixion and then was cursed to roam the Earth until the Son's second coming. Moreover, in his essay, he compares several narrative similarities between that of the Wandering Jew and the Mariner, including the age of the Mariner, the crime, and the wanderings. Unlike many authors I have already mentioned, he does not feel like the moral seems tacked on to the poem, but that it a discernable and just the Mariner's perspective after his adventure: "The Mariner simply teaches what he has learned from experience and years of penance, that a penitent spirit best attains grace" (813). This insight differs directly to many scholars because they find that the moral does not seem to come from a man who has "learned" from his experiences but seems as though it's

either from a man who is only guessing at his own story's moral or the author simplifying the meaning of the narrative.

In 1973, L. M. Grow makes his claim that "The Rime" is an allegory regarding a man's perspective of the unknown. The Mariner has actions done upon him during his adventure that he attempts to explain through a human mindset, not understanding the complexities of the natural and spiritual world that may not be comprehensible to the human brain. In this manner, it feels as though Coleridge was writing his own thoughts about the mysteries of life:

> The Mariner's efforts to answer the question 'what is real?' come in the form of attempts to explain the nature of his surroundings, his experiences, and the application of what he has learned about them to others. This is enticingly close to what Coleridge himself tried to do. Even closer to Coleridge himself, at least to one side of Coleridge's character, is the picture we have of the Mariner. It may not be too far-fetched to suggest that Coleridge has the Mariner voice his own anxieties, feel his own guilt, and suffer externally what Coleridge suffered internally while the Mariner faces the same task that Coleridge did: penetrating the numerous veils of illusion which mask the fundamental facts and principle of the universe (28).

For Grow, this poem was a way for Coleridge to explore the possibilities of the unknown, facing his own worries and examining the possibilities in the depths of nature and of spirituality. By pondering the world, as Grow claims, in an "external" lens, Coleridge is able to grapple with his "internal" mental struggles.

As I have been making abundantly clear, what is consistent in all of these 20th-century interpretations is a desperate desire to make something of the poem's moral, but that desire probably also testifies to the impossibility of the task. More recently, maybe given an acknowledgement of this impossibility, critics have treated the poem in novel ways and shifted the focus from the question of its moral or lack thereof. For example, James B. Twitchell, in 1977, wrote that "The Rime" could be an example of a vampire story due to some characters rising from the dead and the many mentions of blood and even the mentioning of blood drinking

(e.g. when the Mariner sucks the contents of his arm to speak). Anca Vlasopolos, in 1979, saw the poem as a version of a Romantic Quest: “The Rime follows the general pattern of Romantic Quests in terms of the hero's psychic pilgrimage, two aspects of the poem—the seeming completeness of circular structure and the imagery used to describe the Mariner's visionary moment-distinguish it from other Quests and mark it as part of Coleridge's oeuvre” (365). Also, a Romantic Quest usually presents the challenges the quester faced as a flashback, as does happen in “The Rime.”

In 1981, a well-respected article regarding “The Rime” was published by Jerome J. McGann. He discusses his own interpretation of the poem, starting his essay with an overview of the critical and textual history in the 19th century and then discussing the poem from a hermeneutical lens. His main conclusion is that “The Rime” has multiple layers of authority:

> For the truth is that the verse narrative and the prose gloss present themselves in Coleridge's poem as the work of two distinct (fictional) personages. The verse narrative appears as one ‘received text’ of an early English ballad, a type that Percy called an ‘old minstrel ballad’ and that Scott, later, called a ‘romantic ballad’ …a) the minstrel's ballad is meant to be seen as dating from the time of Henry VII or thereabouts-in any case, certainly after the voyage of Columbus but prior to the age of Shakespeare-and (b) the editor is a later figure still, a scholar and an antiquarian whose prose indicates that he lived sometime between the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth centuries” (41)

To McGann, “The Rime” before the added gloss mimics that of a ballad written before the Shakespearean-Age. However, the gloss acts as a scholar who comes about interpreting the poem, moralizing moments in the poem that seeming did not need to be moralized beforehand. Like an old pagan tale, McGann believes that the Mariner’s story was shared orally then adapted into a ballad and later glossed over by another eye. McGann claims, “In general, Coleridge means us to understand that the ballad narrative dates from the sixteenth century, that the gloss is a late seventeenth-century addition, and, of course, that Coleridge, at the turn of the nineteenth century, has provided yet another (and controlling) perspective upon the poetic material” (50).

McGann believes that the original story is one of pagan origin that was adapted to become a Christian poem by either the minstrel, the scholar who added the gloss, or both, with Coleridge adding a fourth and final "controlling perspective" to a tale already adapted before. "The Rime" becomes a layered text following many translations and additions that have turned the story into a condensed mess.

Richard Holmes, in his own book on Coleridge, spoke on the different three main interpretations of the poem: "The first is biographical … The second interpretation is religious or sacramental. The third approach may be called aesthetic: the Mariner is seen as a forerunner of the poète maudit, the artist who breaks the bounds of convention in his search for beauty and self-knowledge" (86-87). Holmes also states that the poem occurs in three realms: the sky, the ground, and the spiritual and unearthly depths, and that when one being destroys or threatens another being in a different realm, there are consequences to be paid.

David S. Miall's 1984 work, "Guilt and Death: The Predicament of The Ancient Mariner," discusses the themes of guilt and death in the poem. He claims that the poem is an autobiographical text of Coleridge's own life and examines the miserable loss he faced as a child: "I shall suggest, is a largely unacknowledged and apparently motiveless guilt, the Mariner's subsequent encounter with death is so terrible that it imposes a psychic wound from which recovery can only ever be partial…It is to declare that human experience has no identifiable meaning, that the world as stage and the players upon it merely constitute a drama of the absurd" (634-635). Miall explains that the Mariner's recovery is only partial, but yet this takes a more upsetting turn when Miall claims that Coleridge utilized the poem to write about his own feelings regarding the world through a state of depression, finding no meaning or opportunity in life. Miall suggests that though Coleridge had many tragedies and hardships in

life, the one for Coleridge that was the most upsetting and had him the most guilt-ridden was the death of his father. Miall quotes C. W. Wahl, a psychological researcher: "Causation is personified and the child feels guilt subsequent to a death, as though he were the secret slayer" (641). Because of the guilt Coleridge may have felt for his own father's death, he may have translated this feeling to "The Rime" where a man haphazardly kills a creature who loves him and is scorned by everyone around him, only able to partially recover from the effects of his own crime.

Recent critics have also continued to take up the questions that critics dealt with almost a century ago. In 1987, for example, Wendy Wall returns to the topic of the gloss and to what extent it subverts the poem's complexity: "In many instances, the gloss flattens poetic language into the discursive as words of action become description. The gloss subverts the energy required by the reader by providing a digested form of verse … Instead of clarification, the gloss reduces the activity of the poem" (185). Instead of adding detail or more intrigue into the narrative, the gloss flattens the dream-like quality of the poem, almost snapping readers out the tale's trance in order to explain away the invigorating experience. Wall states that Coleridge identified two types of readers of "The Rime" and that the gloss may have been an unwanted addition in order to satisfy his lazy readers:

> In Shakespearean Criticism, Coleridge points out four types of reader, two of which are: '(1) Sponges who absorb all they read and return it nearly in the same state, only a little dirtied. (2) Strainbags, who merely return the dregs of what they read.' On one level, the gloss does return the dregs of the verse, the action minus its emotional impact … Coleridge, who quite often complained of his public's inability to read poetry and who had for nineteen years been subjected to criticism that the 'Rime' was obscure, seems to be slyly mocking the sponge-like reader (182)

Coleridge may have been unsettled when readers had no interest in digging into the actual meat of the story and instead wanted the poet to explain all of the poem's complexities so that they

would not have to wrestle with the meaning of "The Rime" but could easily walk away from the poem without giving it a second thought. Wall argues, then that Coleridge added the gloss as some sort of sly trick, only using the gloss as an added vague interpretation for those who were not reading carefully enough. As many scholars, as well as Wall, have claimed, the gloss distracts and sometimes relays contrary information to the actual Mariner's tale, leaving readers with a fractured experience, lost in the battle between the fantasy verse and the stale prose. Therefore, in Walls opinions, the added gloss would have satisfied the lazier readers but frustrated his more determined ones.

In 1998, Debbie Lee approached the poem via a radically different lens, viewing the entire narrative as not biographical or religious, but a historical piece discussing the horrific nature of yellow fever and the supposed guilt of sailors involved in the slave trade. She suggests that the appearance of the men and sickly nature of the poem may have been related to the yellow fever, a nautical disease faced by sailors who traveled across the sea. She also states that this poem represents European guilt revolving the slave trade: "As one can imagine, this 'subversion of all morality' by the British brought with it an overwhelming sense of guilt. Coleridge and other writers began to see European guilt in the same way doctors saw yellow fever's black vomit: as a primary symptom" (684). One could gather from this perspective that the Albatross represents the people affected by colonialism that were haphazardly killed for the Europeans' own gain, leaving some sailors with a sense of prolonged guilt for their interference in the affairs of other cultures and communities.

At the turn of the 21st century, Susan Eilenberg deconstructed "The Rime," focusing on the ventriloquy of the Mariner as a voice for not only Coleridge to speak though but also nature and the spiritual world. She mentions the fact that the Mariner has no proper name, leaving him

an almost lifeless character who the reader can only hope is telling his story truthfully: “But readerly dependence upon the Mariner – an obviously unreliable narrator – limits our ability to distinguish with any degree of certainty between psychological or linguistic and physical or metaphysical effects; we have a hard time deciding how much the tale’s oddity has to do with the oddity of its teller and how much it has to do with the oddity of its material” (285). Because the Mariner is unreliable, the reader must either take the Mariner’s word that the tale is true or deny the Mariner’s experience as the falsity of a tragic man. Eilenburg also points out that, “An alien spirit thus comes to inhabit the body of the Mariner’s speech, which, endlessly iterated and claiming no source in the Mariner’s will, must be regarded as enclosed in invisible quotation marks. The tale that comes out of his mouth is not his” (286). Again, as Eilenburg stated above, the Mariner is only a mouthpiece, and is supposedly forced to tell the story by an unknown force until he can find the indiviudal he needs to relate the narrative to. Moreover, all characters in the story are a mouthpiece for Coleridge, relieving his mind of some psychological anxieties.

The varied attempts to make sense of the poem continued into the 21st century. Peter Melville’s 2004 essay focuses on the Wedding-Guest (a character who, up to this point in the history of the poem’s criticism, rarely gets focused on as the subject of an entire article). In Melville’s persepctive, the Mariner is the Wedding-Guest’s own Albatross: “The choice that the Wedding Guest does make, or that he is forced to make (i.e., to listen to the Mariner’s tale), does indeed counterbalance the inhospitable slaying of the Albatross, insofar as he refuses to refuse his would-be interlocutor, his spectral visitor” (17) Because the Wedding-Guest chooses to listen to the Mariner’s tale instead of attending the wedding, The Wedding-Guest has already found himself in a better place than the Mariner when he killed the Albatross. He accepts the story for his own use and eventually leaves the wedding a “wiser” but “sadder” man.

Eight years later, in 2007, Audan Mahmutovic returned to the uncanny quality of "The Rime," arguing that the world of the poem is beyond comprehension but yet the Mariner cannot seem to grasp this fact: "For it is two different modes of being-in-the-world occurring simultaneously: the one in which everything has meaning, and the other in which nothing does … He cannot stop reasoning and interpreting" (96). Instead of allowing the world to remain elusive from human understanding, the Mariner is constantly trying to figure it out its meaning, leaving him unsatisfied and with a flawed moral at the end of his expereince.

A year later, in 2011, G. Leadbetter returned to the question as to whether or not the poem can be considered Christian and argued that it is decidedly not: "On the contrary, by juxtaposing the narrative with a Christian explanation that fails to contain it, Coleridge draws attention to that failure" (165). Instead of a Christian allegory, Leadbetter views "The Rime" as any other folk tale, possibly taking some elements from different cultures but not having a specific place or time. He actually finds some similarities with other pagan stories such as that of the Odyssey. For example, similar Odysseus who offers blood to spirits to relieve his speechlessness, the Mariner drinks his own blood so that he may speak. Also, Leadbetter notes that though snakes are seen as one of the evilest creatures in Christianity, it is the water-snakes that actually offer Mariner redemption instead of damning him. Leadbetter then moves onto another topic: the appearance of the Mariner at the beginning of his story. He states, "In retrospect, the first word of the poem—in which the mariner is spontaneously realized—discloses his altered state: 'It is an ancient Mariner' (PW I.1 373; my emphasis) announces that he is both more and less than human" (178). The otherworldly characterization of The Mariner as well as his supernatural "glittering eye" not only captures the Wedding-Guest's attention but also

the readers, allowing Coleridge's poetic magic to take its inevitable hold upon you (Coleridge, line 3).

In 2011, we transition back to the psychological undertones of the Mariner, a current popular research trend involving "The Rime" as mental health becomes more relevant in today's culture. Fred Ribkoff and Karen Inglis equates the Mariner to survivor victims of massive traumas and explain how the Mariner's responses relate to those who also suffered from guilt due to these tragic events: "Trauma theory documents that the only means to long-lasting relief from trauma is to engage in a dialogic process of witnessing with an 'authentic listener' [Laub 73] or a 'survivor by proxy'" (2). By recounting his story over and over again, the Mariner is attempting to integrate himself back into society to find some sense of relief from his guilt:

> "The Mariner, …, like many trauma survivors, is compelled to tell his story because it remains 'indecipherable,' unintegrated, and incomprehensible, like an anomaly demanding a new or alternate paradigm of thought …The Mariner judges himself, as do his fellow crew members, by altogether inappropriate terms, something the reader becomes aware of as he or she witnesses him or herself becoming a 'survivor by proxy'" (3).

The Wedding-Guest and even the reader then become a part of the agony and confusion of the story, entangling themselves in the trauma – making them "survivor by proxy," meaning that listeners, such as the Wedding-Guest, become a victim of a traumatic event because they have been told a traumatic experience story by a survivor that disturbs the listener so much that it psychologically affects them. These authors also delve into the possibility of why the Mariner never explains why he killed the Albatross: "When it comes to the shooting of the Albatross, the paratactic gap in narrative framing is induced by unintegrated, incomprehensible, overwhelming trauma. This gap, negotiated every time the Mariner articulates his tale, is the direct result of dissociation" (6). Many people who suffer guilt tend to dissociate from their own trauma. For Ribkoff and Inglis, the Mariner's sense of guilt for a massive trauma beyond his control compels

him to continue regurgitating the story so that someone in the world may eventually see him for what he is: human.

Another writing pair, Satendra Singh and Abha Khetarpal, speak about the psychological elements of "The Rime" as well. They pinpoint the phobias the Mariner might have faced during his nautical journey. They believe that the Mariner may have PTSD, due to the psychological damage felt by the trauma; Claustrophobia, as there are many lines in the poem about the Mariner feeling closed in; as well as many other psychological problems the Mariner may have due to his traumatic voyage.

Around the same time these essays on the poem and trauma were published, in 2014, Nasir Uddin discussed how Coleridge uses the reader's willing suspension of disbelief for "The Rime:" "The action of the poem is laid first in the distant and unfamiliar Polar region, and then in an equally unknown Tropics. So whatever happens there has more acceptability than those that could happen in a known atmosphere" (251). Because the setting of the poem is unfamiliar to many readers, that unfamiliar setting paradoxically makes the poem more plausible than it would be if "The Rime" took place somewhere readers would recognize. She continues, "The Mariner with his strange 'glittering eye' has at first turned the status of the stranger into that of a three year old child. So the Guest is now psychologically vulnerable to fantasy. He is no more in a position to accept or reject things on the basis of logic and therefore, 'he cannot choose but hear' and believe" (252). The Mariner reduces the Wedding-Guest, and possibly the reader, to that similar of a child. Children easily believe the stories they are told, so by reducing the reader down into that child-like mindset when reading the story, Coleridge makes "The Rime" more easily digested. The child-like tone and characteristics of the poem pull the any reader, adult or

child, into the world of The Ancient Mariner, allowing them to imagine a world with a Polar Spirt and Life-in-Death.

In 2015, author duo Syed Zahid Ali Shah and Nasir Jamal Khattak move in the opposite direction, stressing the poem's undecipherability. Their essay focuses on the character of the Mariner himself and claim that he is someone with no background: "He eludes histories, cultures, religions, and geographies" (96). Because the Mariner has no discerning characteristics, it allows readers to picture themselves as the Mariner, becoming the main character of "The Rime." His story then becomes their own, one in which then can expand their horizons, find mysteries and hellish things, and finally return home. Interestingly, the next year, 2016, the duo published another essay, a psychological analysis of "The Rime" that attempts to account for some of those mysteries through a Jungian analysis, a method in which one may bring together some unconscious thought in a person with their more conscious brain in order to create a more balanced human psychologically. To Shah and Khattack, "The Rime" is a way for Coleridge to unconsciously explain his own experience. Shah and Khattack explain that dreams were important to Coleridge because, during his lifetime, it was a popular belief that dreams were messages. Due to the dream-like quality of the poem, it could be assumed that Coleridge used that style delve into his own unconscious thoughts. For example, they state, "Early childhood experiences (latent infantile contents) keep interacting with experiences of adulthood. As an instance, the Mariner's killing of the albatross (when the latter is symbolically taken as the mother imago in the siblings' rivalry) is an unconscious act of killing the mother or the brother on part of Coleridge" (78). The poem then becomes a living dream, one in which anyone may come and dissect and attempt to understand its complexities, but only the author, or dreamer,

truly understands it. These critics seem to offer a tantalizing answer about the poem's moral, but again it eludes their grasp.

We see a similar end result in Peter Murphy's essay, also published in 2016, in which he discusses the moral of "The Rime" and how the act constant storytelling plays into the poem: "The poem, in any of its many versions, might be a fertile generator of meaning but it is most clearly an excellent generator of a troubled craving for explanation" (514). Just like the Mariner, the reader too also craves explanation, as one can see from the many attempts to interpret the poem from critics and readers alike. In this sense, we all become the Mariner attempting to explain his narrative through our own understanding of "The Rime." It is also Murphy's opinion that the ending moral may not directly align with the story: "The Mariner provides a lesson, near the end, but he does not insist that loving both man and bird and beast is a moral imperative analytically derivable from his tale. He only insists that it is a good thing to know" (516). Though many scholars, as seen above, would disagree with this argument, it is an interesting opinion to think that the moral was just tacked on in order to get a message – any message – across. In Murphy's own words, "In the simplest terms morals reduce stories in volume: they make the story smaller and hence more conceptually portable" (520-521). In other words, it may not be in our best interest to pick apart the moral as it lessens the story overall.

One year later, in 2017, James Vigus returns to the topic of slavery and nautical diseases in his essay on "The Rime." In his opinion, the Mariner suffered from scurvy: "Melancholy and an intense homesickness known as 'scorbutic nostalgia' were also acknowledged symptoms of scurvy, which was thought in particular to attack those with an 'idiosyncrasy, or peculiarity of temperament' (Lamb 2000, 162, quoting the medic Thomas Trotter). The rotting wood of becalmed ships was thought actively to spread scurvy" (365). He also states that scurvy causes

hallucinations, which would explain the strange beings the Mariner witnessed. Vigus also brings up slavery:

> The image of the 'dungeon-grate' evokes the area of a ship where slaves would have been tied up for flogging. The young Coleridge, who lent his voice to the abolitionist movement, called in 1796 for a boycott of the products of the slave-trade, such as sugar. He demanded his readers' sympathy for the plight of slaves: 'Would you choose to be sold, to have the hot iron hiss upon your breasts, after having been crammed into the hold of a Ship with so many fellow-victims, that the heat and stench arising from your diseased bodies, should rot the very planks?' (The Watchman, in Coleridge 2004, 297; see Empson 1972, 29–30). When the Mariner recounts that 'all the boards did shrink' (120) and 'The very deep did rot' (123), he seems to echo Coleridge's own words" (366)

Using Coleridge's own words, Vigus notes the similarities between the poem's language and language we associate with the slave passage across the ocean. Altogether though, Vigus believes that the poem is about "universal corruption of the human will" because when the Mariner shoots the Albatross his of own will, he inevitably becomes enslaved to his own choices (372). This interpretation seems forced, to say the least, but again, that it feels forced says something about the mysteriousness of the poem.

In the 2020s, another popular trend began to take hold when discussing "The Rime:" the application of ecocriticism to the question of its meaning. As the topic of climate change becomes more and more in the public consciousness, so does looking at the poem through this (maybe surprising) lens. Simon C. Estok authored two papers on this topic alone, one in 2020 and one in 2021, discussing how Coleridge used this poem to speak about loving and protecting nature. In the first essay, he discusses what he terms the "zombie crew" (the Mariner's crewmates who come back to life) and how they may relate to climate action:

> These zombie crewmates are in a place where no one wants to be, a place of horror and thwarted human agency, where order has dissolved and the rhythms of nature have ceased. This is the promise that the zombies bring. This is the effect of that fateful arrow…Part of this threat, this vengeance, this mortal response to the unwarranted and, indeed, senseless killing of the albatross is that nature will become unpredictable (274)

For Estok, because the Mariner has killed the Albatross and by doing so destroys the sanctity of nature, the zombie crew becomes the physical embodiment of the dissolve between humanity and nature. When the Mariner disrupts the environmental sanctity, he disrupts humanity as well, demonstrating the cause and effect of humanity's relationship with the natural world. In 2021, Estok extends his argument by focusing on – of all things – the slime and "slimy things" in the poem (Coleridge, line 125). He claims, "The threat here is that the slime and the narrator might be or become indistinguishable" (136). The Mariner views the slime as a revolting specimen; nature as well is also seen as malicious and cruel in the poem. However, it is from the slime that the Mariner must find beauty in order to be redeemed. Coleridge uses the grotesque slime in order to emphasize just how important it is for humanity to embrace and love nature, even the ghastliest creatures. The poem's horror – and its darker implication- are turned on their head.

Just last year, in 2022, Dr. Hend Hamed Ezzeldin discussed trauma and memory in "The Rime." This essay emblematizes a final trend in the critical scholarship that seeks to make sense of the poem's moral by way of trauma theory. Ezzeldin argues that the Mariner must suffer from PTSD because he is the last known survivor of a significant trauma. In her opinion, "Levine explains that normal responses to threat include 'hyperarousal, constriction, helplessness, and dissociation' (1997, p.143). At this moment, the Mariner appears to be wondering about the aftermath of his survival and beginning to bear the guilt on his shoulder for being the sole survivor" (203). Many survivors, as we've discussed above via other critics' psychological analyses of "The Rime," stress this guilt, feeling as though they are somehow solely responsible for the trauma. Moreover, Ezzeldin believes that it is the Albatross that induces the Mariner's guilt: "I believe the albatross incarnates the mariner's sin and exposes it to the public; it epitomizes an incessant reminder to the traumatized soul that he deserves to be punished

perpetually for remaining alive" (203).For the Mariner, The Albatross is the representation of his crime, and he believes that he is responsible for the entire traumatic event occurring including his crew's death and his survival. The Mariner, then, makes the Albatross a representation of his loss and guilt because it signifies his unfair punishment because he was allowed to live while others died. Without the Albatross's death, there is no trauma, and his shipmates could still be alive but, with its death, the Mariner is a criminal who suffers less than his counterparts for his heinous deed.

The above survey of scholarship on "The Rime" is long and may seem ultimately frustrating in terms of gleaning anything coherency in it. As I have been demonstrating, the more interpretations that have been advanced to account for the poem's moral, the more the possibility of determining that the morality recedes into the distance. But not all hope is lost. With the help of one scholar I've spoken of above, Jerome McGann, and his theory regarding the layered possibility of "The Rime" as well as the history of the Christian colorization of Beowulf, I intend to make the argument that Coleridge did not intend for the moral to have place in one specific time period but for it to able to shift and continue translating into any time, space, and culture.

Interpretation

As one can conclude from my extensive overview of the critical reception of the poem, "The Rime" is a text that begs to be interpreted and yet eludes every attempt at interpretation. However, we must emphasize that there is still much to gain from this piece of poetry as our culture shifts and our world becomes a different place, leaving new scholars the chance to reinterpret the Mariner's journey in their own ways.

These new interpretations benefit from responding to other critics' readings. In the remaining portions of my thesis, I want to offer my own reading of "The Rime" that responds to the critical literature and stakes out new ground. Of all the critics' arguments I have summarized above, the one that seems most useful to my interpretation is McGann's. Because our overview of McGann's work – "The Meaning of the Ancient Mariner" – has been quite a few pages back, I want to reiterate his points here. McGann argues that the poem has multiple layers: the first being the original story, possibly orally reiterated during the pre-Christian era; the second being the created ballad by the minstrelsy around the 16th century; the third being the added gloss which he believed would have come about in the 17-18th centuries; and finally, Coleridge's own adaptation and revision of the poem.

Like McGann states in his essay, the basis of "The Rime" would have been an oral poem, like those of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* or Homer's *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. McGann assumes that "The Rime" was a communal oral poem before a traveling minstrel flourished it into a folk ballad. McGann explains, "Indeed, the common practice of the ancient minstrels-in contrast to the new, developing line of leisured poets-was not to compose new works but to adapt and extend the older ones which descended through the tradition from primitive pagan times" (49). Therefore, one could assume that Coleridge stylized the poem to mimic that of a folk ballad, which aligns with this theory that "The Rime" was turned into a folk ballad in the medieval period. It would also explain the references to the Christian deity and the Christian-influenced gloss because minstrels would have been incentivized to make the poem more relatable piece for medieval folk, and by doing so, adding these Christian aspects that would not have been a part of the original story as told orally.

If we imagine, therefore, that the first layer of "The Rime" is an orally transmitted piece, McGann states that the second layer would have then been, as stated above, the narrative turned ballad by a minstrel. To McGann, this second layer would mostly likely be represented in the version without the gloss, most likely the 1798 version. The third layer would then be the antiquarian and scholar who added the gloss, adding more confusion to the text because, as stated above by many critics, the gloss adds assumptions that cannot be found in the text. The fourth and final layer would then be Coleridge's adaptation along with his many revisions.

Where our two theories differ is how we assess the overall goal that Coleridge set out for "The Rime." McGann claims that more experienced readers would have gathered that Coleridge was creating a poem in which he was not the original author but an additional 19th century voice transmitting another controlling voice onto the narrative. However, I disagree with this statement as I do not believe that even the best reader would have been able to come to this conclusion, because it would assume that they would imagine Coleridge creating a poem as if he were not the original author but only an added author, creating a confusing and unexplainable theory. In my opinion, Coleridge is not acting as though he is an additional critic adding to an already longstanding poem, but that he is mimicking, through the long process of writing and revision, the act of an oral narrative being translated and adapted through different periods of cultural thought. Therefore, the 1798 version would act as the written down minstrel ballad and each new revision thereafter acts as another scholar coming about to add their own interpretation over the poem, whether that be through small line changes, added epigraphs, or even 58 prose paragraphs (the gloss) to explain the entirety of the Mariner's journey. However, McGann and I would both agree that this poem seems to embody one that has an oral foundation.

The claim that "The Rime" springs from the oral tradition is interesting in relation to the dense textual and critical reception history that has been discussed above. This claim may seem surprising to readers of this thesis. If anything, as I have shown, the poem is an intensely *written* piece, as one can see from the fact that Coleridge rewrote the poem a known eighteen times. Therefore, how can one argue that such an overly drafted piece was originally a verbal creation?

Another critic can help with this argument. Stillinger, a critic who (as I explained above) tended to focus on Coleridge's revisions, notes that Coleridge believed revision was one of the most important aspects of any writing process, and consequently revised almost all of his poems extensively throughout his lifetime. Some may view the act of revision as an author's sense of insecurity about his own work and therefore the author must feel the need to rewrite the poem in order to meet his own egotistical needs of his work. However, I do not believe that is the case for "The Rime," though it may be for Coleridge's other poems. With the "The Rime," it is apparent to me that the edits and revisions were intentional, creating a model to mimic the way in which older oral texts are translated, transformed, and adapted to fit into the culture that it is being adapted into. No one can deny that "The Rime" includes forms of Christian symbolism, for example, its frequent mentioning of Christ (see, for example, line 487, where Coleridge refers to "Oh Christ! what saw I there!"). However, one can argue that this tale was not intentionally created to represent a story that was Christian in its origin. McGann claims that even though this tale might be Christian in name, it may not have begun that way: "I refer specifically to the idea, which Coleridge explicitly endorsed, that the biblical narratives were originally bardic (oral) poetry which gradually evolved into a cycle of communal literary materials" (48). Not all biblical stories are inherently Christian, most of the Old Testament being of the Judaic faith. Also, many stories, like *Beowulf* (which I will speak on later in this thesis), have a been

translated in the medieval period in such a way that a Christian lens has been put upon this pagan poem, as argued by F. A. Blackburn. Also, McGann follows Coleridge's own religious beliefs regarding the creation and eventual writing of the biblical stories:

> Coleridge's view is that the Scriptures are, as it were, a living and processive organism, one that comes into existence in human time and continues to develop in that 'fallible' and limited sphere. This view leads him to affirm that the Bible is indeed the Word of God, but that its Word is uttered by God's mortal creatures … God's eternal Word is expressed and later reexpressed through commentary, gloss, and interpretation by particular people at different times according to their differing lights. (43).

Therefore, "The Rime," may not have been an originally Christian tale but one that was translated in such a way to reflect those beliefs. "The Rime" was not intended to be a text written by one man in 1798 but a timeless text demonstrating timeless truths that would be returned to again and again by different authors and readers. If Coleridge had lived up to the present day, I conjecture that there would have been many more revisions, flowing through each cultural shift and each place it could have been adapted into. From 1798 to the final known revision in 1834, Coleridge intended to demonstrate in a relatively small time period the process of interpretation and translation of an otherwise archaic text into a contemporary idiom.

One example to explain this phenomenon is the transmission and interpretation of *Beowulf.* F. A. Blackburn's "The Christian Coloring in the *Beowulf*" hypothesizes that the poem must have been orally told during a pagan time and that a Christian monk, whose job was to copy old texts, changed the pagan undertones to reflect the popularity of the Christian religion. In one example, he counts all the uses of the Christian deity's name or an expression relating to his name. He states the following regarding these names: "No further change is needed in many of the passages cited to remove the Christian tone and make them entirely heathen" (217). The same could be said for the Christian names in "The Rime." Although Blackburn points out that in *Beowulf* there are no mentions of Christ, virgins, or saints, the implication being that the

person who originally came up with the poem did not know of Christ and therefore it could not have been written in the Christian time-period, there are mentions of these Christian figures in "The Rime." However, I still believe these names can be explained with the same logic that Blackburn uses. In lines 294 and 295 of the 1798 version, Coleridge writes "To Mary-queen the praise be yeven / She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven." The only Christian meaning gained from these lines are from two names: one of place," Heaven," and one of person, "Mary-queen." Using Blackburn's logic, one only needs to change the name of "Mary-queen" to that of a feminine pagan queen and "Heaven" to that of the pagan afterlife in order for the poem to become heathen again.

Indeed, Coleridge performs telling substitutions of Christian names in two different versions of the poem that suggests they are replaceable. In the 1798 version, Coleridge writes, "Ne dim ne red, like God's own head" (97). However, in 1800 he changed this line to the following: "Nor dim nor red, like an Angel's head" (93). Though the second version still possibly holds a Christian tone, it nevertheless demonstrates how easily one could change the names of the Christian-like figures. He changes another name as well. In the 1798 version, Coleridge writes, "And Christ would take no pity on" (234), but in the 1834 version he changed it to, "And never a saint took pity on" (234). Again, although the second version is still Christian in nature, the change demonstrates the fact that these Christian titles were interchangeable, meaning they too could have been changed for something pagan before the name of "Christ" was added.

Blackburn's argument about *Beowulf* qualifies other long passages of Christian allegory as interpolation by the Christian copyist. For example, he states that there is a long passage

regarding the fact that Grendel, the beast that Beowulf must fight, is a son of Cain. Blackburn explains,

> An interpolation may be an intentional insertion by the copyist, and the motive for such insertion may be what it may; or it may be unintentional, the scribe inserting the matter because he supposes that it belongs there. The latter is most often the case when additional matter has been written on the margin. The copyist supposes that this matter has been added because it was omitted by the former scribe, and therefore puts it in. He does in this way just what the compositor now does with the additions of the proof-reader, and misplacement is likely to occur, as it now does, if the position of the new matter is not carefully marked (18).

In other words, when the mentioning of a longer Christian allegory takes place, it may be because a proof-reader had written something regarding a Christian message in the margin and a copyist had added it accidentally when it was not clearly marked where it was supposed to be written in. However, in my own interpretation, I do believe this had occurred but was purposefully changed in order to meet the Christian allegory.

Just like *Beowulf*, "The Rime" is a malleable piece of literature. From my overlook of the critical reception history over the past century, within each cultural shift, it is evident that "The Rime" has gained new meanings with each new generation of readers and critics. In the early 1920s-30s it was Christian or Freudian where now in the 2020s it is a tale of mental illness or a poem emphasizing the need to fight for the environment. Coleridge demonstrates its adaptability with his own revisions. Therefore, it could be assumed that the moral of the poem is not a definite singular one that readers must figure out in order to "be right," but that rather the moral *must* shift to meet and respond to each new trend in the literary and social community.

I will now delve into the poem itself, close-reading certain passages that will demonstrate not only the oral nature of the poem, but also the fact that the moral does not have one finite meaning but can be infinite in nature. The main version I will be using to achieve this goal is the

one written in 1834, the final version approved by Coleridge. (However, I will be mentioning other versions of the poem for remarks about revisions.)

In order to support the claim that "The Rime" represents an oral poem, one must first recognize a major literary device used in this type of storytelling: repetition. In the oral tradition, repetition was used in order to not only keep the audience engaged with the story and to inform the plot overall, but also to keep the act of performing the pieces easier, because by repeating certain parts of the poem, the orator would not have to remember as much, making it easier for him to retell the story many times in a similar fashion. Although repetition does not always mean a poem was originally an oral piece, the extent of repetition is a major factor in determining whether the poem could potentially be originally oral. Repetition is certainly found throughout "The Rime." For example, these two stanzas, the fifth and the tenth, repeat the same sentiments:

> The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
> He cannot choose but hear;
> And thus spake on that ancient man,
> The bright-eyed Mariner (17-20)
>
> The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
> Yet he cannot choose but hear;
> And thus spake on that ancient man,
> The bright-eyed Mariner (37-40).

The last three lines of these two stanzas not only emphasize the Wedding-Guest's dismay at having to hear the Mariner's tale, but they also excite the listeners, engaging them in the strangeness of the tale. If the Wedding-Guest repeatedly can't help but hear the Mariner, then maybe the same applies to the listener.

Another telling use of repetition can be found in the following stanzas, the seventh and the twenty-first, each regarding the movement of the sun:

> The Sun came up upon the left,
> Out of the sea came he!
> And he shone bright, and on the right
> Went down into the sea (25-28)

> The Sun now rose upon the right:
> Out of the sea came he,
> Still hid in mist, and on the left
> Went down into the sea (83-86)

The repetition in these two stanzas calls attention, before and after the shooting of the Albatross, to the opposition of nature to the Mariner's action. The sun now rises and sets on the opposite side as is normal after the death of the Albatross, causing the listener to feel uneasy about the Mariner and his crews' predicament after the shooting. The only major difference is the first phrase of the corresponding 27th and 85th lines: "And he shone bright … Still hid in mist." The bright sun initiates the journey, exhilarating the Mariner and his fellow crew for the hope of new adventures, but after the Albatross has been killed, the sun is in mist, representing the uncertainty of the characters and the readers about the future of all on board.

There is also a similar theme in the following two stanzas, the eighteenth and twenty-second, which both call attention to the disruption of the journey after the Albatross' death:

> And a good south wind sprung up behind;
> The Albatross did follow,
> And every day, for food or play,

Came to the mariner's hollo! (71-74)

And the good south wind still blew behind,
But no sweet bird did follow,
Nor any day for food or play
Came to the mariner's hollo! (87-90)

Coleridge begins the first stanza by speaking of the south wind that continues to blow the ship along. Although the wind remains after the Albatross has been killed, Coleridge seem to emphasize for the reader that something seems to be missing. He uses the word “still” in line 87 to show that the overall nature of the event has not entirely changed, aside from the movement of the sun and the loss of the bird. This repetition allows the orator to build a slow sense of dread as though something strange and horrific is about to happen but will only slowly be revealed.

These next two stanzas, the twenty-third and twenty-fourth, also use repetition to demonstrate opposition, although in a different sense from the last four stanzas mentioned:

For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow! (93-96)

Then all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist. (99-102)

In the first of these two stanza, the Mariner’s crewmates are upset with him for killing the Albatross that they believed was guiding them through the icy landscape. However, in the

corresponding lines in the second quoted stanza, they cheer on the Mariner, saying that it "'Twas right" to kill the bird that they now believed brought them the fog and mist, which made their journey even harder. In the first stanza, the other crew members call the Albatross "the bird" but then move on in the second stanza to saying "such birds." The switch from singular to plural suggests that the Albatross no longer holds a special place for the crew but is now lumped in with other birds who might have caused them distress. The change from, "the bird" to "such birds" goes from an urgent phrase to one that sounds relaxed, allowing the orator to divert the listeners' expectation by temporarily relieving them of any stress after the death of the Albatross.

The next repeated verses emphasize the Mariner's environment and use repetition to amplify the listeners' stress:

> The ice was here, the ice was there,
> The ice was all around:
> It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
> Like noises in a swound! (59-62)
>
> Water, water, every where,
> And all the boards did shrink;
> Water, water, every where,
> Nor any drop to drink. (119-122)

The reiteration of "ice" in the first stanza and "water" in the second – and the fact that "ice" and "water" are, in a sense, the same thing and thus constitute a repetition in and of themselves – makes listeners feel almost closed in by the forceful nature of the images; one cannot escape their sounds, just as in the first stanza, the crew cannot escape the repeated cracking of the ice.

Aside from the topic of repetition, another similarity between "The Rime" and the poems of the oral tradition that predates Christianity and/or align with a more pagan world (poems like *Beowulf* or even Homer's epics) is that "The Rime" can stand outside of the realm of Christian allegory, even though – at the same time – it can be adapted to a Christian frame. As I noted earlier, the gloss makes its supposed Christian reading explicit; ditto for the way that the Albatross is described as a crucifix around the Mariner's neck. But the same poem includes figures that pointedly resist such readings: the Polar Spirit, Death, and Life-in-Death.

After the Albatross had been killed, several of the crew members believe that a water spirit has followed them from the icy landscape, and they have no indication of why:

> And some in dreams assured were
> Of the Spirit that plagued us so;
> Nine fathom deep he had followed us
> From the land of mist and snow. (131-134)

As Bostetter states, the Polar Spirit "is certainly less a Neoplatonic daemon than a kind of primitive totem-force" (245). As found in many pagan societies, some animals have their own spiritual force or can be a vessel in which a certain god may inhabit and roam the Earth. The Polar Spirit's purpose in "The Rime" differs from what would be expected if this was a Christian text. The fact there is a spiritual being other than God or angels points to the fact that this text harbors some aspects of a pagan oral poem. The Polar Spirit even has the power to demand penance for the killing of the bird who it supposedly loved. Though it seems that the Mariner believes that God burdened him with his punishment, as he states in the moral at the end of the poem regarding the love of all God's creatures, it is actually the Polar Spirit who seems to have authority and who must be repaid for the Mariner's supposed crime. In this reading, the lost

authority taken from the Polar Spirit and assumed by the Mariner (and some critics) to be held by God must be a Christian colorization of the poem because “The Rime” supports the claim that the Mariner is being punished by a pagan spirit and not a merciful God.

The other two characters that interest me in this regard, Death and Life-in-Death, also diverge from a Christian reading of the poem. When the Mariner sees a skeleton ship crossing the unmoving sea, he discovers Death and Life-in-Death, Life-In-Death being described as a woman in all versions but Death not being described at all, aside from specifying him male, in the 1834 version. The Mariner exclaims what he saw the pair doing aboard the ship:

> The naked hulk alongside came,
> And the twain were casting dice;
> 'The game is done! I've won! I've won!'
> Quoth she, and whistles thrice. (195-198)

Again, Bostetter acknowledges the strange aspect of this game: “But the most disturbing characteristic of this universe is the caprice that lies at the heart of it; the precise punishment of the Mariner and his shipmates depends upon chance. The spectre crew of Death and Life-in-Death gamble for them” (244). Bostetter claims the dice are loaded, but this argument must be fleshed in order to explain the non-Christian aspect of the dice. The dice are only loaded in the sense that we know the Mariner will be punished by Life-In-Death because we know from the beginning of the story that he, the Mariner, is still alive (although that is questioned by the Wedding-Guest at a certain point). Despise that fact, the dice are loaded because of this advanced knowledge of the reader/listener. In the actual present of the events laid forth by the poem, the dice roll is a game of chance. Neither Death nor Life-In-Death knew whether they would win the Mariner. If the two characters had known the outcome of the dice roll, it could be

argued, for one, that the two wouldn't have played the game all and would have just enacted their punishments and that, two, the woman would not have made those happy exclamations if she knew all along she would win.

Now that we understand the loaded dice claim, we can focus on how these characters and this dice roll suggest that this poem was not originally Christian. As many who study the Christian religion know, God is the one who determines death and punishment. The fact that chance has any say in the fate of the Mariner and the crew points to the fact that this poem cannot have a conventional Christian meaning. As Bostetter states, "Surely it knocks out any attempt to impose a systematic philosophical or religious interpretation, be it necessitarian, Christian, or Platonic, upon the poem" (244). Therefore, with the authority of the Polar Spirit and chance as dominant forces over the Mariner's punishment, one must acknowledge that a Christian interpretation of the poem cannot support the entirety of the poem's narrative.

Although I mentioned in a previous paragraph in the Critical reception history how Coleridge's gloss does not always coincide with the actual narrative of the poem (e.g., when the gloss states that the crew are accomplices in the crime [see lines 99-102], but that complicity is not stated in the text), I want to add two additional examples as I feel they will further support my point further that the gloss is not the standard explanation of the narrative but an interpretation mimicking that of a antiquarian's glossing of a text, which also forces a Christian reading upon, "The Rime." The example I referenced above focused on the gloss that foreshadowed the crew's eventual punishment. However, in the next two examples, there is no foreshadowing of events but a forced interpretation that is offered nowhere else in the poem. The first example regards the shooting of the Albatross:

"God save thee, ancient Mariner!

From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?"—With my cross-bow
I shot the Albatross. (79-82)

The gloss next to this stanza states: The ancient Mariner inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen. (Coleridge, 379). Ribkoff and Inglis, two critics mentioned in the Critical reception history, speak on this unsupported claim: "Some of the most obvious examples of the Gloss Writer's interpretive stance include his claim that the Mariner 'killeth the pious bird of good omen' when there is absolutely no proof that the bird is pious or an omen of any sort" (9). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "pious" means "having or showing reverence and obedience to God; faithful to religious duties and observances; devout, godly, religious" ("Pious", def. 1b). Though the Mariner says, "As if it had been a Christian soul, / We hailed it in God's name," that does not particularly mean that the bird is "pious." (Coleridge, lines 65-66). As the Mariner claims, they "hailed it in God's name" "[a]s "if" it were a Christian soul, meaning it was similar to a "Christian soul" but could not be exactly defined as such. Also, birds can't be devoutly religious in anyway, so that is an oversight on the glossist's part. Moreover, an "omen" is defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "An event or phenomenon regarded as a portent of good or evil; a prophetic sign, an augury" ("Omen," def. 1). Nowhere in the text does it support the idea that some spiritual figure sent the bird either to warn or warm the Mariner and his crew's spirits. The Albatross is less a sign from God and more of a symbol for the Mariner. What the Albatross represents, as seen in the Critical reception history, is not particularly determined.

Another example of the gloss making assumptions not found within the text can be found later on in the poem when the ship is being pushed on by the Polar Spirit:

> And now this spell was snapt: once more
> I viewed the ocean green,
> And looked far forth, yet little saw
> Of what had else been seen—(442-445)

The gloss beside this stanza has another unsupported prose interpretation: "The curse is finally expiated" (Coleridge 405). Again, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "to expiate" means "To pay the penalty of" ("Expiate," def. 4). However, this gloss is contradicted 40 lines before by one of the two voices in part five:

> The other was a softer voice
> As soft as honey dew:
> Quoth he, "The man hath penance done,
> And penance more will do." (406-409)

The spirit clearly states that the Mariner's curse is not "expiated" and the stanzas that fill the next forty or so lines do not depict any action that the Mariner performs in order to make amends for his murder. In fact, the Mariner states that he still is paying penance for his crime because he is a part of no community and wanders from land to land telling his story more out of force than from desire. Therefore, the gloss directly contradicts two characters of "The Rime's" own statements regarding the continued punishment.

Now that we've established that this poem cannot sit in a strictly Christian realm and that there must be several layers of translation and adaption of the text, we also cannot say that there are not any Christian aspects to the poem in its entirety. It is actually the blending of these two aspects, the Christian and the pagan, that paradoxically allows the poem to sit outside of each category. In other words, the fact that each interpretation – pagan, Christian, or any other as seen in the Critical reception history, of "The Rime" – could fit within the meaning of the poem

demonstrates how universally this poem should be recognized. Even the gloss, with its flaws, is its own representation of how a religious antiquarian would view the oral tale of the Mariner's journey. David Perkins supports this claim: "In most of [Coleridge's] utterances on the subject of beauty, for example, he assumed that a beautiful work of art had this quality in itself and universally. Beauty is not historically relative. Coleridge believed in the reality of genius, which by definition transcends its times," (446). The beauty of the Mariner's tale is not that it can be explained in one meaning, but that it can be used to express almost any idea in any cultural space. As new research topics arise, such as the rise of mental health discussions and the importance of climate change in the 2020s, the Mariner's tale can be used to help support any author's topic regarding these themes. Coleridge's intention was not to make a piece that was inherently anything, but something that can be changed and used in any circumstance to fit any situation. In other words, whatever moral someone may find in this poem is a just moral, even as the next definition of the moral will cancel the first one out.

Coleridge also continuously changed "The Rime" – at least eighteen times, as Stillinger claims, with possibly more changes unknown to us – in a process similar to that of most archaic poems that get repeated, adapted, and translated over time, each new version changing the original. For example, the archaic language was removed in the 1800 version of "The Rime," similar to the way a modern translator of *Beowulf* (for example, Seamus Heaney) may include more modern phrases and terms than a translator of the same poem in the 18th century would. In the rest of the revisions, there were small wording changes, such as the singular form of a word turned into its plural, or one word being substituted with a similar one. However, these kinds of additions in the verse text itself never fundamentally changed the Mariner's tale overall. In fact, it was the outer prose additions, such as the gloss or the changing title or Arguments, that caused

the tale to take on a new meaning. As I stated in the Textual History, the Argument in the 1798 version summarized the poem in a geographical lens while the Argument in the 1800 version summarized the poem as one that focused on a system of justice. The gloss, as well, added more of a Christian moral over the poem that was not directly stated before. These outside changes, ones that could be argued were added by Coleridge mimicking the work of writers translating a text as fits best into their own sense of the world, demonstrate the everchanging nature of the poem.

The interesting thing is that the Mariner's tale is in fact oral. "The Rime" begins with the Mariner stopping the Wedding Guest and abruptly beginning his tale: "'There was a ship,' quoth he." (Coleridge, line 10). Within ten lines, the reader is experiencing a layered text, one that is written but also one that records speech. Therefore, the text itself self is no longer one of a single dimension but is crossed through not only different times but different literary spaces.

The Ancient Mariner explains, as I stated above regarding his continued penance, that he is forced to tell his story again and again from the force of some innate feeling:

> Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched
> With a woful agony,
> Which forced me to begin my tale;
> And then it left me free.
>
> Since then, at an uncertain hour,
> That agony returns:
> And till my ghastly tale is told,
> This heart within me burns.
>
> I pass, like night, from land to land;

I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach. (578-590)

His supposed forced storytelling may represent those of ancient storytellers who felt the need to retell their stories to explain the world around them. The Mariner may feel a sense of "agony" from having to retell the story without his own consent, but he states that this story has a purpose: to "teach." He finds the person who needs to hear his tale and springs it upon them.

Surprisingly enough, the Mariner provides his own moral regarding his mysterious journey:

Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. (610-617)

However, this moral, as many have stated in the Critical reception history, does not seem to match the overall narrative of the poem. However, that's not the point of the moral the Mariner gives. His final proclamation to the Wedding-Guest is the Mariner's interpretation of the event. He has become another layer, relaying his own message regarding what he believed was the meaning of his journey. As I have already explained, the point whether the Mariner's own moral is valid or not does not ultimately matter. In fact, the moral, maybe because it feels insufficient,

actually compels the Wedding-Guest to contemplate the story, beginning the chain of interpretation that continues to this day and that will outlast us:

> He went like one that hath been stunned,
> And is of sense forlorn:
> A sadder and a wiser man,
> He rose the morrow morn (622-625)

We too may rise "the morrow morn" after our own encounter with this strange tale told by the Ancient Mariner, and attempt to conjecture at what Coleridge intended to tell his readers with "The Rime." However, for now, we too must add our own link to the chain, adding our own interpretation of "The Rime" onto the vast number already created and wait for those still yet to be made so that hopefully, we may bring the anchor of "The Rime" finally down to rest out of the sea of possibility and unto the land of comprehension.

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