Coleridge :

A Poem of Pure Imagination: an Experiment in Reading

THE DISCUSSION OF *The Ancient Mariner* always begins with reference to Mrs. Barbauld, that lady of "fine taste, correct understanding, as well as pure integrity," as Crabb Robinson called her. I suppose it is only reasonable to begin the discussion with Mrs. Barbauld, for if that "best specimen of female Presbyterian society in the country" is long since dust, her children, male and female, are legion and vocal. The famous remark to which her fine taste and correct understanding gave utterance had to do with a poem which, upon its appearance, had given offense to the judicious. A long time after the appearance of the poem itself, the poet, now a weak and lisping old man, recorded Mrs. Barbauld's remark, if we can believe the report in *Table Talk*, and his own comment upon it:

> Mrs. Barbauld once told me that she admired *The Ancient Mariner* very much, but that there were two faults in it—it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability, I owned that that might admit some question; but as to the want of a moral, I told her that in my own judgment the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the *Arabian Nights* tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he *must* kill the aforesaid merchant, *because* one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son.

This passage, to which I shall return, gives Mrs. Barbauld her uneasy immortality.

I do not quote it, however, to pay the wonted tribute of a sneer. In fact, I am inclined to sympathize with the lady's desire that poetry have some significant relation to the world, some meaning. True, the kind of meaning prized by her female Presbyterian sensibility leaves something to be desired in the way of subtlety, if we are to judge from her own poems—from, for example, "An Inventory of the Furniture of Dr. Priestley's Study," "Inscription for an Ice-house," "Address to the Deity," or "To Mr. S. T. Coleridge, 1797," in which she advises the "youth beloved of Science—of the Muse

beloved," to shun the "maze of metaphysic lore," where Indolence "fixes her turf-built seat." But it is easy to sympathize with her general point of view. The instinctive demand for significance is healthy, and one can especially sympathize with it after encountering a brand of hyperaesthetical criticism of our poem. This brand of criticism does not, to my knowledge, occur in the purlieus of bohemianism or in the shimmering pages of the *fin de siècle*, but rather, it flourishes in the very citadels of academic respectability, and in the works of some of the most eminent and sober students of Coleridge.

For example, one such critic, after stating that the passage concerning Mrs. Barbauld makes it forever clear that there was "no intention to give the poem a moral meaning," goes on to say: "Obviously, only the reader who cannot enjoy this journey into the realm of the supernatural finds it necessary to seek out a moral." [1]

There are two questions involved here: First, what did Coleridge mean in the passage from the *Table Talk*? Second, what does Earl Leslie Griggs, the critic referred to above, mean by his remark? It so happens that Griggs has misread his text when he takes it as evidence that there is no "moral intention" in the poem. For Coleridge, according to his young kinsman Henry Nelson Coleridge, who recorded the *Table Talk*, did not say that the poem as it exists has no moral, but said that it suffers from the "obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly." Nor did he say or even imply that the poem would be better if there were *no* moral. He merely said that the "obtrusion of the moral sentiment" is too "open." If the passage affirms anything, it affirms that Coleridge intended the poem to have a "moral sentiment," but felt that he had been a trifle unsubtle in fulfilling his intention. So all the critics who take this passage to argue that Coleridge intended *The Ancient Mariner* to be a poem without a theme, without relevance to life, have, like Griggs,

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1. The notes to this essay begin on p. 272.

reversed the undebatable sense of the text of the *Table Talk*.

Now, at the risk of a digression, I shall turn to the second question: what does Griggs mean by the word *moral* when he says that the poem has no "moral intention"? I take it that Griggs uses the word *moral* in a broad, general sense, equating it with theme understood as comment on human conduct and values. If he means something more specific, he has not given any indication of it. And if this broad, general sense is what he means, he is saying that the poem has no theme.

Presumably Griggs' remark is based on some theory of "pure poetry"—some notion that a poem should not "mean" but "be," and that the "be-ing" of a poem does not "mean." The actual statement he makes, however, does not concern his own, but Coleridge's theory of poetry: Coleridge, he says, had no "moral intention" and the poem has no theme. It may be that Griggs has stated his views a little unclearly and holds that special variant of the general theory of pure poetry which says that poetry (which is pure realization—however that may be interpreted) does make comments on life but that the truths it offers us are not worth listening to.

But even that is a very different thing from asserting that a poet, Coleridge in this case, is not even undertaking to deliver an utterance about life. His theme may be a statement of error, but it is a statement. My first purpose in this essay is to establish that *The Ancient Mariner* does embody a statement, and to define the nature of that statement, the theme, as nearly as I can.

It may be objected that Griggs does not, however, wish the word *moral* read in the broad, general sense which I have here provisionally adopted —that he intends such a narrow sense that room is left for all sorts of themes and meanings, just so long as they are not too painfully reminiscent of Sunday School. If that be objected, I can only appeal to the context of his statement. Why does he give us the simple alternatives of a "moral intention" and an enjoyable "journey into the realm of the supernatural"? And why does he dismiss so airily what he calls the "various efforts at interpretation," and specifically S. F. Gingerich's theory that the poem symbolizes the doctrine of necessitarianism? But I have dwelt on this matter only because it represents a point of view, about both *The Ancient Mariner* and poetry in general, which one frequently encounters. And certainly I do not wish to appear ungrateful to Griggs, to whom all admirers of Coleridge owe a great debt.

Nor do I wish to appear ungrateful to John Livingston Lowes,[2] whose views on this point will next engage us. Lowes seems to accept a very different premise from that of Griggs, for he says that "some interest deeply human, anchored in the familiar frame of things," was fundamental to Coleridge's plan. This "interest deeply human" turns out to be the idea of transgression and absolution, and of the train of consequence which persists even after absolution as what the Gloss terms "the penance of life." "You repent," says Lowes, "and a load is lifted from your soul. But you have not thereby escaped your deed. . . . It is the inexorable law of life."

This much, in itself, would seem to constitute a theme for the poem, a comment on human conduct and values. But Lowes now proceeds to reverse the direction of his argument—or if he does not do precisely that, he limits his reading of the function of the theme so that it is to be understood as having no relevance to actual life. The law of life appears in the poem, he says, merely to unify and "credibilize" the poem, because "we accept illusion only when in some fashion it bears the semblance of truth." He demands: "Has it still another end, to wit, edification?" He quickly adds that he is well aware of Coleridge's homiletical propensity, but he denies "edification" as being the poet's intention: "Nevertheless, to interpret the drift of 'The Ancient Mariner' as didactic in its intention is to stultify both Coleridge and one's self. For such an interpretation shatters the world of illusion which is the very essence of the poem."

The argument here is so vaguely put that it is difficult to understand precisely what the critic does mean. In one sense, it is quite true that the "intention" of the poet is not to "edify" the reader but to make a poem. In that sense, Lowes may be understood. But we must remember that in so far as the poem is truly the poet's, in so far as it ultimately expresses him, it involves his own view of

the world, his own values. Therefore the poem will, for better or worse, have relevance, by implication at least, to the world outside the poem, and is not merely a device for creating an illusion. But this is precisely what Lowes proceeds to deny. The poem has, he says, no reference to reality: "And through the very completeness of their incorporation with the text of 'The Ancient Mariner,' the truths of experience which run in sequence through it have lost, so far as any inculcation of a moral through the poem is concerned, all didactic value." He supports this view by saying that "the 'moral' of the poem, *outside the poem,* will not hold water," because "consequence and cause, *in terms of the world of reality* are ridiculously incommensurable," and "punishment . . . palpably does not fit the crime."

What this amounts to seems to be this: (1) Coleridge introduces a theme into his poem merely as a structural device—he did not intend for it to be taken seriously. (2) We would not take it seriously anyway because it violates our moral sense—a man should not have to suffer so much just for shooting a bird.

These pronouncements lead me to a further statement concerning my purpose here: I shall try to establish that the statement which the poem does ultimately embody is thoroughly consistent with Coleridge's basic theological and philosophical views as given to us in sober prose, and that, without regard to the question of the degree of self-consciousness on the part of the poet at any given moment of composition, the theme is therefore "intended." [3] I shall also try to establish that the particular ground given by Lowes for the rejection of the relevance of the "moral" is based on a misreading of the poem—a reading which insists on a literal rather than a symbolic interpretation. In the end, I shall be attacking, in new terms, the position held by Griggs, for just as Griggs defines the poem as a journey into the supernatural for the sake of the journey, so Lowes defines it as an illusion for the sake of illusion. For them both, the poem is nothing more than a pleasant but meaningless dream.

The poem's "inconsequence is the dream's irrelevance," says the author of *The Road to Xanadu,* and thereby summarizes the view held by a large body of critics, who, either by way of praise or blame, have commented on the dreamlike quality of the poem. For such critics, as for Swinburne, Coleridge is one of the " 'footless birds of Paradise,' who have only wings to sustain them, and live their lives out in a perpetual flight through the clearest air of heaven." For these critics, *The Ancient Mariner* has no contact with reality. To support this view, that the poem is no more than a dream, they appeal to the report, in De Quincey's *Literary and Lake Reminiscences,* of Coleridge's remark that "before meeting a fable in which to embody his ideas, he had meditated a poem on delirium, confounding its own dream-scenery with external things, and connected with the imagery of high latitudes."

Let us examine the nature of this evidence. Coleridge presumably did connect his poem with dreams, just as he referred to his poem "The Raven," if we are to take Lamb's word, as a dream.[4] And we can well believe that a good deal of the *material* for the poem may have come from the poet's opium dreams. But the fact that Coleridge himself made this association between the poem and dreams does little to support the view that he thought of the poem as having no theme with a ref-

erence to reality. Coleridge's notion concerning dreams forbids that interpretation. "Dreams," he puts it in the *Table Talk*, "have nothing in them which is absurd and nonsensical." And again: "You will observe that even in dreams nothing is fancied without an antecedent *quasi* cause. It could not be otherwise." And in connection with speculations on the significance of dreams and visions: ". . . Who shall determine to what extent the reproductive imagination, unsophisticated by the will, and undistracted by intrusions from the sense, may or may not be concentred and sublimed into foresight and presentiment?"

There is no reason, however, for us to go to Coleridge's theory of dreams. De Quincey's sentence, in fact, betrays the critics who would use it to prove that Coleridge intended *The Ancient Mariner* to have no theme with a reference to reality, for the sentence says quite flatly that Coleridge's "ideas" preceded the "fable." In other words, at least according to De Quincey, there had been a general idea, a theme, in the poet's mind which finally found its appropriate medium of expression in the story of the "old navigator." And if the idea had an independent existence before an appropriate fable was hit upon, the idea must have had for the poet more than the structural importance assigned to it by Lowes. An idea can scarcely be said to function merely to unify and credibilize if nothing exists for it to unify and credibilize.

So much for one piece of evidence offered to support the view that the poem's "inconsequence is the dream's irrelevance." But there is another piece of evidence usually offered for this view—the passage from the *Table Talk* already quoted. I have pointed out how Griggs misreads one part of that famous passage. Let us look at it more closely. In it Coleridge refers to his poem as a work of "pure imagination," and it is this phrase which is most often offered to support the view held by Griggs, Lowes, and their school of readers. I am inclined to believe that they take the word imagination here at their own convenience and not in Coleridge's context and usage. They take it, as a matter of fact, in the casual and vulgar sense, as equivalent to meaninglessness or illusion; or if they don't take it in the casual and vulgar sense, they take it in terms of a poetic theory of illusion for illusion's sake which, as stated, denies significance to the word as fully as does the casual and vulgar sense.

Actually, a little reflection instructs us that the word was for Coleridge freighted with a burden of speculation and technical meaning. His theory of the imagination, upon which his whole art-philosophy hinges, "was primarily the vindication of a particular attitude to life and reality." And it would be strange if Coleridge, with his lifelong passion for accuracy of terminology and subtlety of distinction, had tossed away that sacred word which stood for the vindication of his most fundamental beliefs as irresponsibly as the merchant in the story of *The Arabian Nights* tosses away the "date shell."

To return to our argument, we must ask what is the burden of technical meaning with which Coleridge had freighted the word *imagination*? At the moment we shall not be concerned with a detailed exposition of Coleridge's theory, and certainly not with an account of the stages of its growth and clarification. We shall be, instead, concerned to see how Coleridge's concept would redeem works of

pure imagination from the charge, amiable or otherwise, of being in themselves meaningless and nothing but refined and ingenious toys for an idle hour.

The key passage for this purpose is the famous one from the *Biographia Literaria,* but we shall group around it other passages drawn from various sources. Here is the key passage:

> The Imagination then I consider either as primary or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I Am. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify.

It is the primary imagination which creates our world, for nothing of which we are aware is given to the passive mind. By it we know the world, but for Coleridge knowing is making, for, "To know is in its very essence a verb active." We know by creating, and one of the things we create is the Self, for a subject is that which "becomes a subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to itself; but which never is an object except for itself, and only so far as by the very same act it becomes a subject." It is irrelevant here whether we accept Coleridge's theory or regard all this, as did the vindictive Carlyle on his visit to the old sage, as a dreary, adenoidal mumbo-jumbo of "om-ject" and "sum-ject," a "mooning singsong" of "theosophico-metaphysical monotony" in a "Kantean haze-world" populated by "dim-melting ghosts and shadows." The point, for present purposes, is that Coleridge attributes to imagination this fundamental significance.

We have been speaking only of what he calls primary imagination, the perception which produces our ordinary world of the senses. Even here we can observe that when "the imagination is conceived as recognizing the inherent interdependence of subject and object (or complementary aspects of a single reality), its dignity is immeasurably raised." But when we turn to his interpretation of the secondary imagination, that dignity is further enhanced. For here we leave creation at the unconscious and instinctive level and define it as coexisting with, and in terms of, the conscious will; here it operates as a function of that freedom which is the essential attribute of spirit.

Does Coleridge imply, however, that the poet in composing his poem acts according to a fully developed and objectively statable plan, that he has a blueprint of intention in such an absolute sense? To this question the answer is *no.* Several texts can be adduced on this point, for example in "On Poesy": "There is in genius itself an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius in the man of genius." But how can this be made to square with the key statement about the secondary imagination as "coexisting with the conscious will"?

Perhaps the answer could be found in an application of Coleridge's discussion of the Self, Will, and Motive. The common idea of will, he says, is the power to respond to a motive conceived of as acting upon it from the outside. But what is motive? Not a thing, but the thought of a thing. But all thoughts are not motives. Therefore motive is a determining thought. But what is a thought? A thing or an individual? Where does it begin or end? "Far more readily could we apply these questions to an ocean billow. . . . As by a billow we mean no more than a particular movement of the sea, so neither by a thought can we mean more than the mind thinking in some one direction. Consequently a motive is neither more nor less than the act of an intelligent being determining itself . . ."[5] But will "is an abiding faculty or habit or fixed disposition to certain objects," and rather than motive originating will, it itself is originated in terms of that predisposition or permanent will.

It seems clear that the secondary imagination does operate as a function of that permanent will, and in terms of the basic concerns by which that will fulfills itself, but the particular plan or intention for a particular poem may be actually developed in the course of composition in terms of that "unconscious activity," which is the "genius in the man of genius," and may result from a long process of trial and error. "The organic form is innate," Coleridge writes in "Shakespeare, a Poet Generally"; "it shapes, as it develops, itself from within, and the fulness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form." Again, he says that the artist will not be successful unless he is impelled by a "mighty inward force," but he distinguishes this force, by implication at least, from plan or intention, for he goes on to say that the "obscure impulse" must "gradually become a bright and clear and burning Idea."[6] In other words, the plan and meaning of the work may be discovered in the process of creation. But it is to be remembered that this process is a function of the permanent will which constantly moves to fulfill itself in consciousness.[7]

It is possible that we have in Coleridge's theory of poetic creation a transposition into psychological terms of Plotinus' doctrine of creation:

> Consider the universe . . . are we, now, to imagine that its maker first thought it out in detail . . . and that having thus appointed every item beforehand, he then set about the execution?. . . All things must exist in something else; of that prior—since there is no obstacle, all being continuous within the realm of reality—there has suddenly appeared a sign, an image, whether given forth directly or through the ministry of soul or of some phase of soul, matters nothing for the moment: thus the later aggregate of existence springs from the divine world in greater beauty. There because There unmingled but mingled here. From the beginning to end all is gripped by the Forms of the Intellectual Realm: Matter itself is held by the Ideas of the elements and to those Ideas are added other Ideas and others again, so that it is hard to work down to crude Matter beneath all that sheathing of Idea. Indeed since Matter itself, in its degree, is an Idea—the lowest—all the universe is Idea and there is nothing that is not Idea as the archetype was. And all is made silently since nothing had part in the making but Being and Idea—a further reason why creation went on without toil. . . .

Thus nothing stood in the way of the Idea . . . the creation is not hindered on its way even now; it stands firm in virtue of being All. To me, moreover, it seems that if we ourselves were archetypes, Ideas, veritable Being, and the Idea with which we construct here were our veritable Essence, then our creative power too would toillessly effect its purpose: as man now stands, he does not produce in his work a true image of himself: become man, he has ceased to be All. . .[8]

However it works in poetic creation, the secondary imagination gives us more than poetry. The secondary imagination, as I. A. Richards puts it, "gives us not only poetry—in the limited sense in which literary critics concern themselves with it—but every aspect of the routine world in which it is invested with other values than those necessary for our bare continuance as living beings: all objects for which we can feel love, awe, admiration; every quality beyond the account of physics, chemistry, and the physiology of sense-perception, nutrition, reproduction, and locomotion; every awareness for which a civilized life is preferred by us to an uncivilized." But Richards, the child of the materialistic Bentham, with whom Coleridge, according to John Stuart Mill, had to divide the intellectual kingship of his age, is here casting into psychological terms what in Coleridge's thought appears often in theological and metaphysical terms;[9] and though Coleridge himself was constantly fascinated by what he called the "facts of mind" and defended the use of the word *psychological,* he was not content to leave the doctrine of the creativity of mind at the psychological level. There is a God, and the creativity of the human mind, both in terms of the primary and in terms of the secondary imagination, is an analogue of Divine creation and a proof that man is created in God's image. Furthermore, the world of Nature is to be read by the mind as a symbol of Divinity, a symbol characterized by the "translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal," which "always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is representative." Reason, as opposed to the understanding, is, in Coleridge's system, the organ whereby man achieves the "intuition and spiritual consciousness of God," and the imagination operates to read Nature in the light of that consciousness, to read it as a symbol of God. It might be said that reason shows us God, and imagination shows us how Nature participates in God.

So, if we look at the phrase, a work of "pure imagination," in the light of Coleridge's theory of the imagination, we see that such a work would be one which not only, to borrow from Coleridge's portrait of the ideal poet, "brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity," and makes of the reader himself a "creative being" in the image of God, but also gives us a revelation, for "all truth is a species of Revelation." And so that phrase "pure imagination" as applied to *The Ancient Mariner* gives us little excuse to read the poem as an agreeable but scarcely meaningful effusion. Not only when Coleridge is theorizing does he insist upon "truth," upon "mean-

ing." He often does so even in casual remarks upon particular poems or poets. For instance: "Not twenty lines of Scott's poetry will ever reach posterity; it has relation to nothing." Or: "How shall he fully enjoy Wordsworth, who has never meditated on the truths which Wordsworth has wedded to immortal verse?"

At this point I wish to anticipate a possible objection. It may be said that I am basing an argument for a certain interpretation of the poem on two passages, one from De Quincey and one from Henry Nelson Coleridge, which have only the status of hearsay testimony and are therefore without legal standing. It is true that we cannot know exactly what Coleridge said on either occasion, but it is not true that I am basing an argument upon these passages. I should be better pleased to leave them out of the discussion altogether and treat only of the poem itself and other material of indisputable authorship. Though I shall not base my own argument upon these passages, I am forced, however, to consider them in detail because they have been used now and again, for more than a hundred years, to support an interpretation of the poem which I consider fallacious. All I wish to put at stake here is this: If these passages of hearsay testimony are to be used at all, they will support my general contention.

II

If *The Ancient Mariner* has a meaning, what is that meaning?

It is true that a poem may mean a number of different things. By this I do not intend to say that a poem means different things to different readers. This is, of course, true in one sense, but true, first, only in so far as the poet fails, as fail he must in some degree, in the exercise of his creative control, and second, in so far as each reader must, as a result of his own history and nature, bring to the poem a different mass of experience, strength of intellect, and intensity of feeling. In this second sense we may say that the reader does not interpret the poem but the poem interprets the reader. We may say that the poem is the light and not the thing seen by the light. The poem is the light by which the reader may view and review all the areas of experience with which he is acquainted.

I do not intend to say merely that a poem has different meanings for different readers, but that it may have different meanings for the same reader. For present purposes we may discriminate two senses in which this is true.

First, it is clear that a poem has different meanings when placed in different perspectives of interest. We may look at it as a document in the history of a language, in the history of literary forms, in the history of political ideas, or in a thousand other different perspectives, and in each of them discover a different kind of meaning. The significant factor in determining the difference among meanings in this sense is that the reader, from outside the poem, prescribes the particular perspective in which the poem is to be placed.

Second, a poem may have different meanings ac-

cording to the different perspectives which are inherent in the poem itself and are not proposed from outside. But it may be objected that the difference between the *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* perspectives may not, in practice, really subsist. An illustration may clarify the distinction proposed. In the play *Julius Caesar* the topic of the transition from the Republic to the Empire appears. The same topic may be regarded in either the extrinsic or the intrinsic perspective. The decisive factor is this: If we regard it in the extrinsic perspective, we relate it to a body of facts and ideas many of which have not the slightest relation to the play. For instance, many of the facts pertinent to this perspective have been discovered and many of the ideas have been formulated since the date of composition of the play. If we regard the topic, however, in the intrinsic perspective, we relate the pattern which the topic receives in the play to other patterns in the play. For instance, the political theme (as we may call the topic as patterned in the play, as viewed in the intrinsic perspective) is related to the other themes, for instance, to the philosophical theme, which is here, I take it, primarily concerned with the question of free will and determinism. In other words, the various extrinsic perspectives disintegrate the play for their own special purposes; the various intrinsic perspectives merely define the themes which, it is assumed, the play unifies and makes mutually interpretive. Any substantial work will operate at more than one thematic level, and this is what makes it so difficult to define *the* theme of a profound creation; the root-idea will have many possible formulations and many of them will appear, or be suggested, in the work.

In *The Ancient Mariner* I wish to distinguish two basic themes, both of them very rich and provocative, and I shall, in the course of my discussion, attempt to establish their interrelation.

One theme I shall call *primary*, the other *secondary*. I do not mean to imply that one is more important than the other. But the one which I shall call primary is more obviously presented to us, is, as it were, at the threshold of the poem. The primary theme may be defined as the issue of the fable (or of the situation or discourse if we are applying this kind of analysis to a poem which does not present a fable). The primary theme does not necessarily receive a full statement. In fact, in *The Ancient Mariner* it receives only a kind of coy and dramatically naïve understatement which serves merely as a clue—"He prayeth best, etc." But the theme thus hinted at is the outcome of the fable taken at its face value as a story of crime and punishment and reconciliation. I shall label the primary theme in this poem as the theme of sacramental vision, or the theme of the "One Life." The operation of this theme in the poem I shall presently explore.

As the primary theme may be taken as the issue of the fable, so the secondary theme may be taken as concerned with the context of values in which the fable is presented and which the fable may be found ultimately to embody, just as more obviously it embodies the primary theme. I shall label the secondary theme in this poem as the theme of the imagination. After having explored the operation of the theme of sacramental unity in the poem, I shall explore the operation of the theme of the imagination, and shall then attempt to define the significance of their final symbolic fusion in the poem.

Before proceeding to the investigation of these themes in the poem, I wish, however, to distinguish them from another type of theme which is sometimes emphasized in the discussion of this work. This type is the personal theme; it is concerned with those internal conflicts of the poet which may find expression in the poem. We have an example of this type of theme defined by Hugh I'Anson Fausset when he writes that the poem is "an involuntary but inevitable projection into imagery of his [Coleridge's] own inner discord. The Mariner's sin against Nature in shooting the Albatross imaged his own morbid divorce from the physical. . . ." Or we find more elaborately developed examples in Kenneth Burke's treatment, in *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, of the sexual and opium motives.

Without question there is an important relationship between such personal motivations and the poem finally created. The poem may very well represent, in one sense, an attempt to resolve such conflicts. The poem, read in this light, may give us a poignant chapter of biography, and as an image of human suffering and aspiration may move us deeply. But we may remember that the poem, even regarded in this light, is not an attempt merely to present the personal problem but an attempt to transcend the personal problem, to objectify and universalize it. And it is because of the attempt to objectify and universalize, that we can distinguish the themes inherent in the poem as such from the personal theme or themes which remain irrevocably tied to the man. The personal experience may provide motivations and materials, but in so far as it remains purely personal it does not concern us in the present context. Burke puts the matter very sensibly concerning his own studies of the personal themes of *The Ancient Mariner:*

> I am not saying that we need to know of Coleridge's marital troubles and sufferings from drug addiction in order to appreciate "The Ancient Mariner" and other poems wherein the same themes figure. I am saying that, in trying to understand the psychology of the poetic act, we may introduce such knowledge, where it is available, to give us material necessary for discussing the full nature of this act. Many of the things that a poet's work does for *him* are not things that the same work does for us (i.e., there is a difference in act between the poem as being-written and the poem as being-read).

For example, Coleridge's drug addiction may have given him the psychological pattern underlying the crime of the Mariner and his sufferings in the poem; we do not have to be drug addicts ourselves, or to know that the poet was one, to respond to that psychological pattern.

It is necessary to emphasize this distinction between the personal and the objective themes, since the present poem, more than most, has suffered from critics who have confused them in dealing with it. Burke's sensible attitude has not been shared by, for instance, Irving Babbitt or John Mackinnon Robertson, who says that Coleridge's work is "an abnormal product of an abnormal nature under abnormal conditions." Robertson's attitude toward the poem, in so far as his reasoning would equate special aspects of the poet's experience with the details of the poem itself, would seem to be the equivalent of the fallacy of *argumentum ad hominem* in logic, and of the fallacy in aes-

thetics of assuming identity of the material and the thing created from the material, for it overlooks the universalizing and normalizing process always inherent in the creative act.

To return to the matter of the objective themes: That more than one theme should be involved, that the poem should operate on more than one level, would be perfectly consistent with Coleridge's emphasis on diversity within unity, and would be but one example of the principle which Coleridge approves when he quotes the remark "of the late Dr. Whitbread's that no man ever does anything from a single motive." The failure to realize this fact about Coleridge's theory of composition has led a number of critics to try to read *The Ancient Mariner* in terms of a two-dimensional allegory, the sort of reading which gives us such absurdities as the point-to-point equating of the Pilot with the Church and the Pilot's boy with the clergy, or of the Hermit with the "idea of an enlightened religion which is acquainted with the life of the spirit and aware of the difficulties which beset it."

Coleridge's not infrequent remarks on allegory should have warned the critics. The method of allegory—if by allegory we understand a fixed system of point-to-point equations—is foreign to his conception of the role of the imagination. "A poet's heart and intellect should be *combined*," he says, "intimately combined and unified with the great appearances of nature, and not merely held in solution and loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal similes." But a passage of greater significance on this point deals with the contrast between false and true religion:

> It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between literal and metaphorical. Faith is either to be buried in the dead letter, or its name and honors usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds symbols with allegories. Now an allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language, which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of sense. . . . On the other hand a symbol . . . is characterized by a translucence of the special in the individual, or of the general in the special, or of the universal in the general; above all by the translucence of the eternal through and in the temporal. It always partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that unity of which it is the representative.[10]

Allegory is, to adopt Coleridge's terms, the product of the understanding, symbol of the imagination.

Now, these statements by Coleridge raise the most profound and vexing aesthetic and, for that matter, epistemological questions, questions which I do not have the temerity to profess to settle. But we are committed to try to arrive at some interpretation, even provisional, of these statements, as applicable to his poetic practice. In trying to do this, we must, for the moment, accept Coleridge's terms as he uses them. For instance, it is not generally held that the "metaphorical" mode is mechanical—is a "translation of abstract notions into a picture-language." Rather, it is generally held that metaphor is the result of a vital and creative activity—that, as Susanne Langer puts it, "genuinely new

ideas . . . have to break in upon the mind through some great and bewildering metaphor." But Coleridge is using the word *metaphor* really to mean bad metaphor, i.e., a construction which has the form but not the function of metaphor. For the construction which exercises the proper function he reserves the word *symbol.*

Let us try to define some of the qualities which for him a symbol exhibits.

The symbol serves to *combine*—and he italicizes the word—the "poet's heart and intellect." A symbol involves an idea (or ideas) as part of its potential, but it also involves the special complex of feelings associated with that idea, the attitude toward that idea. The symbol affirms the unity of mind in the welter of experience; it is a device for making that welter of experience manageable for the mind —graspable. It represents a focus of being and is not a mere sign, a "picture-language." [11]

The symbol, then, is massive in the above sense. But it is massive in another sense, too. It has what psychoanalysts call condensation. It does not "stand for" a single idea, and a system of symbols is not to be taken as a mere translation of a discursive sequence. Rather, a symbol implies a body of ideas which may be said to be fused in it. This means that the symbol itself may be developed into a discursive sequence as we intellectually explore its potential. To state the matter in another way, a way perhaps more applicable to the problem of interpreting the present poem, a symbol may be the condensation of several themes and not a sign for one.

The symbol is focal and massive, but Coleridge introduces another quality into his description. He says that it is not mechanical (like allegory) and that it "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible." The same thing is said here in two ways. What is said is that the symbol is not arbitrary—not a mere sign—but contains within itself the appeal which makes it serviceable as a symbol. Perhaps a distinction may help us here. A symbol may avoid being arbitrary in two ways: by necessity and by congruence.

By a symbol of necessity I mean the kind of symbol which is rooted in our universal natural experience. The wind in *The Ancient Mariner* is such a symbol. All phallic symbols, for example, are of this order. When Coleridge speaks of the poet's heart and intellect being intimately combined with the "great appearances of nature," he may be hinting at the idea of necessity. It is true, of course, that he takes these great appearances of nature to be revelatory of a supersensuous reality. For him Nature symbolizes God, though, as a matter of fact, there is also in Coleridge's thought the idea of a projective symbolism in Nature by which man realizes not God but himself. The problem of these two separate and perhaps contradictory ideas in Coleridge's thought on the symbolism of Nature need not concern us here. What does concern us here is that he apparently has some notion that the great appearances of Nature as symbols carry in themselves a constant, rich meaningfulness; in other words, he has some notion of the symbol of necessity. This would seem to be what is implied, too, by his statement that the symbol "partakes of the reality which it renders intelligible."

I would distinguish, tentatively, the symbol of congruence from the symbol of necessity by saying that the former does not come to us bearing within itself the reason for its appeal to us but is validated by the manipulation of the artist in a special context. For instance, Byzantium is a symbol in the poetry of William Butler Yeats, but without the special context which he creates and the special manipulation which he makes of Byzantium it would never be a symbol for us. This does not mean that he could take any city—ancient Athens or modern Detroit—and make a symbol of it for the same purpose. Byzantium does offer him certain qualities which he can manipulate for the purpose in hand and fit into his special context: the naturalistic art of Athens, to take one aspect of his symbolic purpose, would not give him the forms he aspires to take when "once out of nature," nor would Detroit and the creations of Henry Ford afford the appropriate congruence. Byzantium offers him the congruence, but it is a congruence which he must discover for himself and validate for us.

In any case, the symbol, whether of necessity or of congruence, cannot be arbitrary—it has to participate in the unity of which it is representative. And this means that the symbol has a deeper relation to the total structure of meaning than its mechanical place in plot, situation, or discourse.

To summarize: The symbol is distinguished by being focal, massive, and not arbitrary. Allegory, in the special use of the term by Coleridge, is not focal or massive and is arbitrary. The distinction which Coleridge sets up may be a little clarified by comparison with the distinction stated more recently by C. S. Lewis, in *The Allegory of Love*.

> On the one hand you can start with an immaterial fact, such as the passions which you actually experience, and can then invent *visibilia* to express them. . . . This is allegory. . . . But there is another way of using the equivalence which is almost the opposite of allegory, and which I would call sacramentalism or symbolism. If our passions, being immaterial, can be copied by material inventions, then it is possible that our material world in its turn is the copy of an invisible world. . . . The attempt to read that something else through its sensible imitations, to see the archetype in the copy, is what I mean by symbolism or sacramentalism.

Coleridge and Lewis, as we learn from other discussions by Lewis, differ profoundly in their estimates of the artistic worth of allegory, but that is not relevant to the point here. The point here is that Lewis indicates, though he does not stress, the massive significance of symbol and the fact that it is not "invented" but discovered or read. And he goes on to make the interesting comment that the poetry of symbolism finds its greatest expression in the time of the Romantics. If this is true—and I think it is—it is strange that some critics should persist in reading the masterpiece of the Romantic poet who gives us most fully a theory of symbolism as though his poem were a simple, two-dimensional allegory. (I say "two-dimensional" here to avoid, if possible, a quibble about terms. If a reader should wish to maintain that allegory can be a system of focal and massive symbols, I would not quarrel with him. I would simply say that I am talking about "bad" allegory.)

What relevance does all this have for the reading of the poem? If we take the poem as a symbolic poem, we are not permitted to read it in the way which Coleridge called allegorical. We cannot, for instance, say that the Pilot equals the Church, or that the Hermit equals the "idea of an enlightened religion which is acquainted with the life of the spirit." The first of these readings is purely arbitrary. The second, though less arbitrary, simply ignores the massive quality of the episode involving the Hermit—considerations such as the Hermit's relation to nature, the function in returning the Mariner to human society, etc., and chiefly the tenor of the whole episode. This allegorical kind of reading makes the poem into a system of equivalents in a discursive sequence. But, as a matter of fact, we must read it as massive, as operating on more than one thematic level, as embodying a complex of feelings and ideas not to be differentiated except in so far as we discursively explore the poem itself. To take another example, we cannot blandly pass by such a crucial event as the shooting of the Albatross with merely a literal reading, the kind of reading which Lowes, among others, gives it—the kind of reading which makes the bird but a bird; the bird has a symbolic role in a symbolic pattern. Nor can we take the act of shooting the bird as merely wanton—or if wanton, in one sense, on the part of the Mariner, it is not to be taken as wanton on the part of the poet, and the nature of the act must participate in the truth of which it is a symbol.[12]

III

In the preceding section I have tried to indicate some reasons inherent in Coleridge's aesthetic theory for believing that *The Ancient Mariner* is to be read at more than one level, that it has more than one "meaning." In this section, I shall look at the poem in terms of what I have called the primary perspective or primary theme—the theme which is the issue of the fable.

The fable, in broadest and simplest terms, is a story of crime and punishment and repentance and reconciliation (I have refrained from using the word *sin,* because one school of interpretation would scarcely accept the full burden of the implications of the word). It is an example, to adopt for the moment Maud Bodkin's term, without necessarily adopting the full implications of her theory, of the archetypal story of Rebirth or the Night Journey. The Mariner shoots the bird; suffers various pains, the greatest of which is loneliness and spiritual anguish; upon recognizing the beauty of the foul sea snakes, experiences a gush of love for them and is able to pray; is returned miraculously to his home port, where he discovers the joy of human communion in God, and utters the moral, "He prayeth best who loveth best, etc." We arrive at the notion of a universal charity, which even Babbitt admits to be "unexceptionable" in itself, the sense of the "One Life" in which all creation participates and which Coleridge perhaps derived from his neo-Platonic studies and which he had already celebrated, and was to celebrate, in other and more discursive poems.

Such an account as the above, however, leaves certain questions unanswered, and perhaps the best way to get at those questions is to consider the nature of the Mariner's transgression. Many critics, even Lowes, for example, dismiss the matter with such words as *wanton, trivial,* or *unthinking.* They are concerned with the act at the literal level only. In substance, they ask: Did the Mariner as a man have a good practical reason for killing the bird? This literal-mindedness leads to the view that there is a monstrous and illogical discrepancy between the crime and the punishment, a view shared by persons as diverse in critical principles as Lowes with his aestheticism and Babbitt with his neo-humanistic moralism. But we have to ask ourselves what is the symbolic reading of the act. In asking ourselves this question, we have to remember that the symbol, in Coleridge's view, is not arbitrary, but *must contain in itself, literally considered, the seeds of the logic of its extension—that is, it must participate in the unity of which it is representative.* And, more importantly, in asking ourselves this question, we must be prepared to answer quite candidly to ourselves what our own experience of poetry, and life, tells us about the nature of symbolic import; and we must be prepared to abide the risks of the answer. It would be nicer, in fact, if we could forget Coleridge's own theory and stick simply to our own innocent experience. But that, at this date, is scarcely possible.

This question—what is the nature of the Mariner's act?—has received one answer in the theory advanced by Gingerich that the Mariner does not act but is constantly acted upon, that "he is pursued by a dark and sinister fate" after having done the deed "impulsively and wantonly" and presumably under necessity. For Gingerich's theory is that the poem is a reflection of the doctrine of necessity which much occupied Coleridge's speculations during the years immediately leading up to the composition of *The Ancient Mariner:* "I am a complete necessitarian, and I understand the subject almost as well as Hartley himself, but I go farther than Hartley, and believe the corporeality of *thought,* namely that it is motion." So the first problem we must consider is to what extent Coleridge was actually a necessitarian, at least in the poem.

It would seem that Gingerich has vastly oversimplified the whole matter, by choosing texts on one side of the question only, and sometimes by ignoring the context of a text chosen. He ignores, for example, the fact that even during the period when Coleridge professed devotion to Hartley he was under the powerful influence of his mystical studies (in Plato, Plotinus, Bruno, Boehme, etc.), and that looking back, in the *Biographia,* on his period of error he could say: "The writings of these mystics acted in no slight degree to prevent my mind from being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system. They contributed to keep alive the *heart* in the *head;* gave me an indistinct, yet stirring and working presentiment, that all the products of the mere *reflective* faculty partook of Death." And in the sentence quoted by Gingerich in which Coleridge proclaims himself a complete ne-

cessitarian, the context has been neglected: Coleridge proceeds to make a joke of the thrashing which "a certain uncouth automaton," Dr. Boyer, had visited upon one of his charges, a joke which indicates an awareness that the acceptance of the doctrine of necessity and materialism doesn't take the pain out of the offended buttocks. But to be more serious, it is possible to reach into another letter of the same general period, a letter to John Thelwall, in December, 1796, and find Coleridge saying flatly, "I am a Berkleyan." And this occurs in a long and passionate letter, really an essay, which is devoted to the attempt to convert Thelwall to Christianity; and in the course of the letter there is a fervid discussion of sin and repentance, concepts which Gingerich, extending certain texts from "Religious Musings" and other poems as a complete and tidy doctrine, denies to Coleridge. Gingerich even goes so far in his ardor to support his cause as to say that in "The Eolian Harp" (1795) Coleridge "conceives universal life as automatous," and proceeds to quote a few lines which in themselves might bear that interpretation. But he simply ignores the rest of the poem. The concluding stanza, which I shall present, follows immediately upon his chosen passage:

But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
Darts, O beloved Woman! nor such thoughts
Dim and unhallowed dost thou not reject,
And biddest me walk humbly with my God.
Meek daughter in the family of Christ!
Well hast thou said and holily disprais'd
These shapings of the unregenerate mind;
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break
On vain Philosophy's aye-bubbling spring.
For never guiltless may I speak of him,
The Incomprehensible! save when with awe
I praise him, and with Faith that inly feels;
Who with his saving mercies healed me,
A sinful and most miserable man,
Wilder'd and dark, and gave me to possess
Peace, and this Cot, and thee, heart-honour'd Maid!

Here the conclusion of the poem repudiates as "shapings of the unregenerate mind" the very statements by which Gingerich would argue for a relatively systematic necessitarianism. And we may note further in this passage that we find quite positively stated the idea of sin, a thing which, according to Gingerich, is not in the necessitarian system or in Coleridge's thought. But we can go to a direct, non-poetic statement in his letters, made just after the completion of *The Ancient Mariner:* ". . . I believe most steadfastly in original sin; that from our mothers' wombs our understandings are darkened; and even where our understandings are in the light, that our organization is depraved and our volitions imperfect. . . ." [13]

The point I wish to make is this: We cannot argue that Coleridge was a systematic necessitarian and that therefore the killing of the Albatross is merely the result of the necessary pattern of things and is not to be taken as sinful *per se* or in extension. The fact seems to be that Coleridge was early moving toward his later views, that he was not, as he says, committed to any dogmatic system, and that, as Shawcross points out, the poems them-

selves "are sufficient to show us that his professed adherence to the necessitarian doctrines of his day was by no means the genuine conviction of his whole being." As early as 1794, he was, we may add, thinking of the mind as an active thing, the "shaping mind"; and if, in one sense, we grant the power of mind we have broken the iron chain of necessity and the individual becomes a responsible agent and not the patient which Babbitt and Gingerich assume the Mariner to be. What A. E. Powell, in *The Romantic Theory of Poetry,* says of Wordsworth, that he lived his philosophy long before he phrased it, is equally true of Coleridge, and in addition to his living into a transcendental philosophy through the practice and love of poetry, he lived into the guilt of opium long before the Mariner shot the Albatross: he knew what guilt is, and if he longed for a view of the universe which would absolve him of responsibility and would comfort him with the thought of participation in the universal salvation promised by Hartley and Priestley, there was still the obdurate fact of his own experience.

We have in these years, it seems, a tortured churning around of the various interpretations of the fact, and the necessitarian philosophy is only one possible philosophy in suspension in that agitated brew. And we even have some evidence that in the period just before the composition of *The Ancient Mariner*—before he had struck upon that fable to embody his idea—the poet was meditating a long poem on the theme of the origin of evil. Early in 1797 Lamb wrote him: "I have a dim recollection that, when in town, you were talking of the Origin of Evil as a most prolific subject for a long poem." [14] As a matter of fact, Coleridge never did "solve" his problem: he found peace simply by accepting the idea of Original Sin as a mystery.

In the *Table Talk* he says: "A Fall of some sort or other—the creation, as it were, of the nonabsolute—is the fundamental postulate of the moral history of Man. Without this hypothesis, Man is unintelligible; with it every phenomenon is explicable. The mystery itself is too profound for human insight."

In his more elaborate and systematic treatment of the subject Coleridge adds another point which is of significance for the poem. Original Sin is not hereditary sin; it is original with the sinner and is of his will. There is no previous determination of the will, because the will exists outside the chain of cause and effect, which is of Nature and not of Spirit. And as for the time of this act of sin, he says that the "subject stands in no relation to time, can neither be in time nor out of time." [15] The bolt whizzes from the crossbow and the bird falls and all comment that the Mariner has no proper dramatic motive or is the child of necessity or is innocent of everything except a little wantonness is completely irrelevant, for we are confronting the mystery of the corruption of the will, the mystery which is the beginning of the "moral history of Man."

The fact that the act is unmotivated in any practical sense, that it appears merely perverse, has offended literalists and Aristotelians alike, and, for that matter, Wordsworth, who held that the Mariner

had no "character" (and we may elaborate by saying that having no character he could exhibit no motive) and did not act but was acted upon. The lack of motivation, the perversity, which flies in the face of the Aristotelian doctrine of *hamartia,* is exactly the significant thing about the Mariner's act. The act re-enacts the Fall, and the Fall has two qualities important here: it is a condition of will, as Coleridge says, "out of time," and it is the result of no single human motive.

One more comment, even though I have belabored this point. What is the nature of this sin, what is its content? Though the act which re-enacts the mystery of the Fall is appropriately without motive, the sin of the will must be the appropriate expression of the essence of the will. And we shall turn to a passage in *The Statesman's Manual.* Having just said that, in its "state of immanence or indwelling in reason and religion," the will appears indifferently as wisdom or love, Coleridge proceeds: "But in its utmost abstraction and consequent state of reprobation, the will becomes Satanic pride and rebellious self-idolatry in the relations of the spirit to itself, and remorseless despotism relatively to others . . . by the fearful resolve to find in itself alone the one absolute motive of action." [16] Then he sketches the portrait of the will in abstraction, concluding with the observation that "these are the marks, that have characterized the masters of mischief, the liberticides, the mighty hunters of mankind, from Nimrod to Bonaparte."

We may observe a peculiar phrase, the "mighty hunters of mankind, from Nimrod to Bonaparte," and in this blending of the hunting of beasts and the hunting of man—for Nimrod was himself both the mighty hunter and the founder of the first military state—we have an identification that takes us straight to the crime of the Mariner. The Mariner did not kill a man but a bird, and the literal-minded readers have echoed Mrs. Barbauld and Leslie Stephen: what a lot of pother about a bird. But they forget that this bird is more than a bird. I do not intend, however, to rest my case on the phrase just quoted from *The Statesman's Manual,* for the phrase itself I take to be but an echo from the poem at the time when the author was revising and reliving his favorite poem. Let us go to the poem itself to learn the significance of the bird.

In the poem itself the same identification occurs: the hunting of the bird becomes the hunting of man. When the bird first appears,

> *As if it had been a Christian soul,*
> *We hailed it in God's name.*

It ate food "it ne'er had eat," and every day "came to the mariner's hollo," and then later perched on the mast or shroud for "vespers nine." It partakes of the human food and pleasure and devotions. To make matters more explicit, Coleridge adds in the Gloss the statement that the bird was received with "hospitality" and adds, after the crime, that the Mariner "inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen." The crime is, symbolically, a murder, and a particularly heinous murder, for it involves the violation of hospitality and of gratitude (*pious* equals *faithful* and the bird is "of good omen") and of sanctity (the religious connotations of *pious,* etc.). This factor of betrayal in the crime is re-emphasized in Part V when one of the Spirits says that the bird had "loved the man" who killed it.

But why did the poet not give us a literal murder in the first place? By way of answering this question, 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.

There is, however, a third way in which the criminality is established. We can get at it by considering the observation that if a man had been killed, we could not have the "lesson of humanitarianism," which some critics have taken to be the point of the poem. But we must remember that the humanitarianism itself is a manifestation of a deeper concern, a sacramental conception of the universe, for the bird is hailed "in God's name," both literally and symbolically, and in the end we have, therefore, in the crime against Nature a crime against God. If a man had been killed, the secular nature of the crime—a crime then against man—would have overshadowed the ultimate religious significance involved. The idea of the crime against God rather than man is further emphasized by the fact that the cross is removed from the Mariner's neck to make place for the dead bird, and here we get a symbolic transference from Christ to the Albatross, from the slain Son of God to the slain creature of God. And the death of the creature of God, like the death of the Son of God, will, in its own way, work for vision and salvation.

It may be instructive to see how another writer has treated these questions in presenting a similar story of the crime against a brute. I refer to Poe's "The Black Cat." In this story precisely the same issues appear, but where Coleridge leaves the issues in fluid suspension and leaves the nature of the crime defined only in the general symbolic tissue of the poem, Poe gives an elaborate analysis of the motivation and meaning of the act:

> And then came, as if to my final and irrevocable overthrow, the spirit of Perverseness. Of this spirit philosophy takes no account. Yet I am not more sure that my soul lives, than I am that perverseness is one of the primitive impulses of the human heart—one of the indivisible primary faculties, or sentiments, which give direction to the character of man. Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or a stupid action, for no other reason than because he knows he should *not*? Have we not a perpetual inclination, in the teeth of our best judgment, to violate that which is *Law*, merely because we understand it to be such? This spirit of perverseness, I say, came to my final overthrow. It was this unfathomable longing of the soul *to vex itself*—to offer violence to its own nature—to do wrong for the wrong's sake only—that urged me to continue

and finally to consummate the injury I had inflicted upon the unoffending brute. One morning, in cold blood, I slipped a noose about its neck and hung it to the limb of a tree—hung it with the tears streaming from my eyes, and with the bitterest remorse at my heart—hung it *because* I knew that it had loved me, and *because* I felt it had given me no reason of offense—hung it *because* I knew that in so doing I was committing a sin—a deadly sin that would so jeopardize my immortal soul as to place it—if such a thing were possible—even beyond the reach of the infinite mercy of the Most Merciful and Most Terrible God.

All we have to do is to read Original Sin for Perverseness; and Poe himself carries us from the psychological treatment under Perverseness to the theological treatment under Sin.

There is another interesting parallel of treatment: the identification, in the crime, of the brute with the human. In the poem the identification is achieved symbolically, as we have seen. But in the story we must have more than this: the police are to arrest the hero and they will not arrest him for killing a cat, even if the killing is symbolically and spiritually equivalent to a murder. But Poe makes the symbolic transference, too. There are two cats, the first is hanged outright. The second cat, which takes the place of the first to plague the conscience of the hero and to frighten him with the white gallows mark on the breast, trips the hero on the stair to the cellar. The man then aims a blow with an axe at this cat, but his wife stays his hand. The blow intended for the brute is then delivered on the woman. The symbolic transference is made but is made in terms of psychological treatment.[17]

To return to the problems raised by the poem: We have not yet done with the matter of crime and punishment. There is the question of the fellow mariners, who suffer death. Here we encounter not infrequently the objection that they do not merit their fate. The tragic *hamartia*, we are told, is not adequate. The Gloss, however, flatly defines the nature of the crime of the fellow mariners: they have made themselves "accomplices." But apparently the Gloss needs a gloss. The fellow mariners have, in a kind of structural counterpoint (and such a counterpoint is, as we shall see, a characteristic of the poem), duplicated the Mariner's own crime of pride, of "will in abstraction." That is, they make their desire the measure of the act: they first condemn the act, when they think the bird had brought the favorable breeze; then applaud the act when the fog clears and the breeze springs back up, now saying that the bird had brought the fog; then in the dead calm, again condemn the act. Their crime has another aspect: they have violated the sacramental conception of the universe, by making man's convenience the measure of an act, by isolating him from Nature and the "One Life." This point is picked up later in Part IV:

> *The many men, so beautiful!*
> *And they all dead did lie:*
> *And a thousand thousand slimy things*
> *Lived on; and so did I.*

The stanza is important for the reading of the poem. The usual statement for the poem is that the Mariner moves from love of the sea snakes to a love of men (and in the broad sense this is true), but here we see that long before he blesses the snakes he is aware, in his guilt, of the beauty of the dead men, and protests against the fact that the slimy things should live while the beautiful men lie dead. In other words, we have here, even in his remorse, a repetition of the original crime against the sacramental view of the universe: man is still set over, in pride, against Nature. The Gloss points to the important thing here: "He despiseth the creatures of the calm."

There is one other aspect of the guilt of the fellow mariners worthy of notice. They judge the moral content of an act by its consequence; in other words, they would make good disciples of Bishop Paley, who, according to Coleridge, in *Aids to Reflection*, was no moralist because he would judge the morality of an act by consequence and not "contemplate the same in its original spiritual source," the state of the will. The will of the fellow mariners is corrupt. And this re-emphasizes the fact that what is at stake throughout is not the objective magnitude of the act performed—the bird is, literally, a trivial creature—but the spirit in which the act is performed, the condition of the will.

So much for the crime of the Mariner and the crime of his fellows. And we know the sequel, the regeneration of the Mariner.[18] In the end, he accepts the sacramental view of the universe, and his will is released from its state of "utmost abstraction" and gains the state of "immanence" in wisdom and love. We shall observe the stages whereby this process is consummated—this primary theme of the "One Life" is developed—as we investigate the secondary theme, the theme of the imagination.

IV

If in the poem one follows the obvious theme of the "One Life" as presented by the Mariner's crime, punishment, and reconciliation, one is struck by the fact that large areas of the poem seem to be irrelevant to this business: for instance, the special atmosphere of the poem, and certain images which, because of the insistence with which they are presented, seem to be endowed with a special import. Perhaps the best approach to the problem of the secondary theme is to consider the importance of light, or rather, of the different kinds of light.

There is a constant contrast between moonlight and sunlight, and the main events of the poem can be sorted out according to the kinds of light in which they occur. Coleridge underscores the importance of the distinction between the two kinds of light by introducing the poem by the motto from Burnet, added in the last revision of 1817 (in fact, the general significance of the motto has, so far as I know, never been explored). The motto ends: "But meanwhile we must earnestly seek after truth, maintaining measure, that we may distinguish things certain from those uncertain, day from night." The motto ends on the day-night contrast, and points to this contrast as a central fact of the poem.We may get some clue to the content of the distinction by remembering that in the poem the good events take place under the aegis of the

moon, the bad events under that of the sun. This, it may be objected, reverses the order of Burnet, who obviously wishes to equate the "certain" or the good with day and the "uncertain" or bad with night. Coleridge's reversal is, I take it, quite deliberate—an ironical reversal which, in effect, says that the rational and conventional view expressed by Burnet seeks truth by the wrong light. In other words, Burnet becomes the spokesman of what we shall presently find Coleridge calling the "mere reflective faculty" which partakes of "Death."

Before we pursue this symbolism in the poem, let us look at moonlight in the larger context of Coleridge's work. Perhaps we shall find that it is serving, not only in *The Ancient Mariner* but elsewhere, the function defined by I. A. Richards: "When a writer has found a theme or image which fixes a point of relative stability in the drift of experience, it is not to be expected that he will avoid it. Such themes are a means of orientation."

As for the moonlight, more than one critic has noted its pervasive presence in Coleridge's work. Swinburne calls Coleridge's genius "moonstruck." And even Irving Babbitt goes so far as to say: "A special study might be made of the role of the moon in Chateaubriand and Coleridge—even if one is not prepared like Carlyle to dismiss Coleridge's philosophy as 'bottled moonshine.'" For the moon is everywhere, from the "Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon" of 1788 on through most of the poems, or many of them, trivial or great, sometimes with a specifically symbolic content, sometimes as the source of a transfiguring light which bathes the scene of *Christabel* or *The Ancient Mariner* or "The Wanderings of Cain" or "Dejection: An Ode" or "The Nightingale" of 1798 or the deep, romantic chasm of "Kubla Khan," and always she is the "Mother of wildly-working visions," as she is called in the sonnet mentioned, or the "Mother of wildly-working dreams," as she is called in "Songs of the Pixies" (1796). And in both the prose and verse, frequently when it is not the moon in this role it is some cloudy luminescence, the "luminous gloom of Plato," or "the slant beams of the sinking orb" of "This Lime-Tree Bower," or the glitter of the sunlit sea seen through half-closed eyelids in "The Eolian Harp."

We have, without question, a key image in Coleridge's moon, or Coleridge's half-light, and Coleridge himself has given us, in sober prose, a clue to its significance. Years later, looking back on the brief period of creative joy and the communion of minds which marked the years 1797 and 1798, he recalled the origin of the *Lyrical Ballads:*

> During the first year that Mr. Wordsworth and I were neighbours, our conversation turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of the imagination. The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moon-light or sun-set, diffused over a known and familiar landscape, appeared to represent the practicability of combining both. These are the poetry of nature.

Here the moonlight, or the dimming light of sunset, changes the familiar world to make it poetry; the moonlight equates with the "modifying colours of the imagination." To support this we have also the account given by Wordsworth in the *Prelude* of the night walk up Mount Snowden in the moonlight:

When into air had partially dissolved
That vision, given to spirits of the night
And three chance human wanderers, in calm thought
Reflected, it appeared to me the type
Of a majestic intellect, its acts
And its possessions, what it has and craves,
What in itself it is, and would become.
There I beheld the emblem of a mind
That feeds upon infinity, that broods
Over the dark abyss, intent to hear
Its voices issuing forth to silent light
In one continuous stream; a mind sustained
By recognitions of transcendent power,
In sense conducting to ideal form,
In soul of more than mortal privilege.
One function, above all, of such a mind
Had Nature shadowed there, by putting forth,
'Mid circumstances awful and sublime,
That mutual domination which she loves
To exert upon the face of outward things,
So moulded, joined, abstracted, so endowed
With interchangeable supremacy,
That men, least sensitive, see, hear, perceive,
And cannot choose but feel. . . .

But to return to Coleridge's own testimony, not rarely we can find the moon appearing in the prose. For instance, we may glance at this passage in *Anima Poetiae* on symbolism: "In looking at objects of Nature while I am thinking, as at yonder moon dim-glimmering through the dewy window-pane, I seem rather to be seeking, as it were *asking* for, a symbolic language for something within me that always and forever exists, than observing anything new." How easily the moon, dim-glimmering, enters the conversation when his mind turns to the imaginative relation of man and Nature.

Let us see how this symbol functions in the poem, in connection with the theme of the imagination. We must remember, however, that here by the imagination we mean the imagination in its value-creating capacity, what Coleridge was later to call the secondary imagination.

We shall not go far into the poem before we realize that the light symbolism is not the only symbolism operating upon us. For instance, we shall encounter winds and storms at various important moments. Our problem, then, is not only to define particular symbolisms, but to establish the relationships among them—to establish the general import.

At the threshold of the poem, however, another consideration intrudes itself upon us. Certain images are first presented to us, and sometimes may appear later, at what seems to be merely a natural level. This question, then, will arise in the minds of certain readers: How far are we to interpret, as we look back at the poem, such apparently natural manifestations which at other times, at the great key moments of the poem, are obviously freighted with significance? In presenting the poem here I shall undertake the full rather than the restricted interpretation. My reasoning is this: Once the import of an image is established for our minds, that image cannot in its workings upon us elsewhere in the poem be disencumbered, whether or

not we are consciously defining it. The criterion for such full rather than restricted interpretation is consistency with the central symbolic import and, in so far as it is possible to establish the fact, with the poet's basic views as drawn from external sources. We can derive no criterion from the poet's conscious intention *at any given moment in the poem,* and this question is, in this narrow sense, irrelevant. (In its broader sense, it will be discussed later in this essay.) In any case, though here I shall undertake a full interpretation, if a reader should wish to interpret the poem in a restricted sense, I would not feel that my basic thesis was impaired. There is always bound to be some margin for debate in such matters.

The problem of the fullness of interpretation presents itself to us at the very outset of the poem. The voyage begins merrily under the aegis of the sun. Is our sun here merely the natural sun, or is it also the symbolic sun? But the question is more acute a stanza or two on, when the storm strikes and drives the ship south, the behavior of the ship being described in the powerfully developed image of flight from a pursuing enemy. Is this a merely natural storm, or a symbolic one as well? Let us linger on this question.

Later in the poem we shall find wind and storm appearing as the symbol of vitality and creative force. A storm, we recall, strikes as a consequence of the Mariner's redemption and brings him the life-giving rain. Is the first storm, then, to be taken with the same force, even though it is presented here in the imagery of a terrible enemy? I do not find the import here inconsistent with that of the storm at the Mariner's redemption. The storm at the redemption, though a "good" storm, is also presented in imagery of terror and power. The ambivalence of the storm is an important feature which is extended and developed later in the poem. But for the present, merely glancing forward to that final interpretation of the wind and storm, we can say that the first storm is an "enemy" because to the man living in the world of comfortable familiarity, complacent in himself and under the aegis of the sun, the creative urge, the great vital upheaval, this "bottomwind," [19] is inimical.

When the storm has driven the ship south, we reach the second stage of the Mariner's adventure, the land of ice. This land is both beautiful and terrible, as is proper for the spot where the acquaintance with the imagination is to be made. Like the storm which drives the ship south, it shakes man from his routine of life. Man finds the land uncomfortable; he loses his complacency when he confronts the loneliness:

> *Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—*
> *The ice was all between.*

But out of this awe-inspiring manifestation of Nature, which seems at first to be indifferent to man, comes the first response to man—the Albatross—to receive the glad "natural" recognition of the mariners.

I have already indicated how the bird-man fusion is set up, how the bird is hailed in God's name, etc., how, in other words, the theme of the "One Life" and the sacramental vision is presented. Now as a moment of great significance in the poem, I wish to indicate how the primary theme of the sacramental vision is for the first time assimilated to the secondary theme of the imagination. The Alba-

tross, the sacramental bird, is also, as it were, a moon-bird. For here, with the bird, the moon first enters the poem, and the two are intimately associated:

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white Moon-shine.

The sun is kept entirely out of the matter. The lighting is always indirect, for even in the day we have only "mist or cloud"—the luminous haze, the symbolic equivalent of moonlight. Not only is the moon associated with the bird, but the wind also. Upon the bird's advent a "good south wind sprung up behind." And so we have the creative wind, the friendly bird, the moonlight of imagination, all together in one symbolic cluster.

As soon as the cluster is established, the crime, with shocking suddenness, is announced. We have seen how the crime is to be read at the level of the primary theme. At the level of the secondary theme it is, of course, a crime against the imagination. Here, in the crime, the two themes are fused. (As a sidelight on this fact, we may recall that in "Dejection: An Ode," Coleridge gives us the same fusion of the moral and the aesthetic. In bewailing his own loss of creative power he hints, at the same time, at a moral taint. The "Pure of heart" do not lose the imaginative power, "this strong music in the soul.")

With the announcement of the crime, comes one of the most effective turns in the poem. As the Wedding Guest recoils from his glittering eye, the Mariner announces:

. . . With my cross-bow
I shot the Albatross.

And then the next line of the poem:

The Sun now rose upon the right.

The crime, as it were, brings the sun. Ostensibly, the line simply describes a change in the ship's direction, but it suddenly, with dramatic violence, supplants moon with sun in association with the unexpected revelation of the crime, and with the fact indicates not only the change of the direction of the ship but the change of the direction of the Mariner's life. The same device is repeated with the second murder of the Albatross—the acceptance of the crime by the fellow mariners. They first condemn the Mariner for having killed the bird "that made the breeze to blow," but immediately upon the rising of the sun, they accept the crime:

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist.

As has been pointed out earlier, the mariners act in the arrogance of their own convenience. So even their condemnation of the crime has been based on error: they have not understood the nature of the breeze they think the bird had brought. But here we must observe a peculiar and cunningly contrived circumstance: the mariners do not accept the crime until the sun rises, and rises glori-

ously "like God's own head." The sun is, symbolically speaking, the cause of their acceptance of the crime—they read God as justifying the act on the ground of practical consequence, just as, shall we say, Bishop Paley would have done. They justify the crime because the bird had, they say, brought the fog and mist. In other words, they repudiate the luminous haze, the other light, and consider it an evil, though we know that the fog and mist are associated with the moon in the wind-bird-moon cluster at the end of Part I.

At this point where the sun has been introduced into the poem, it is time to ask how we shall regard it. It is the light which shows the familiar as familiar, it is the light of practical convenience, it is the light in which pride preens itself, it is, to adopt Coleridge's later terminology, the light of the "understanding," it is the light of that "mere reflective faculty" that "partook of Death." And within a few lines, its acceptance by the mariners has taken them to the sea of death, wherein the sun itself, which had risen so promisingly and so gloriously like "God's own head," is suddenly the "bloody sun," the sun of death—as though we had implied here a fable of the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason, whose fair promises had wound up in the bloodbath of the end of the century.

In the poem, however, at this point where the agony begins, we find an instructive stanza:

> *And some in dreams assuréd were*
> *Of the Spirit that plagued us so;*
> *Nine fathom deep he had followed us*
> *From the land of mist and snow.*

This Polar Spirit, as the Gloss will call him later, is of the land of mist and snow, which we have found to be adjuncts of the wind-bird-moon cluster; hence he, too, belongs to the same group and partakes of its significance. Two facts stand out about the present "carrier" of the imagination: his presence is known by dreams and his errand is one of vengeance. The first fact tells us that the imagination, though denied or unrecognized, still operates with dire intimations at a level below the "understanding"; "understanding" cannot exorcise it and its subconscious work goes on. The second fact tells us that, if violated and despised, the faculty which should naturally be a blessing to man will in its perverted form exact a terrible vengeance.

The fellow mariners do not, of course, comprehend the nature of the Spirit whose presence has been revealed to them in dreams. They have learned, by this time, that a crime has been committed and that vengeance is imminent. But they do not know the nature of the crime or their own share in the guilt. So in their ignorance they hang the Albatross about the Mariner's neck. Thus the second major stage of the poem concludes.

Part III consists of two scenes, one of the sun, one of the moon, in even balance. The first is the appearance of the specter-bark, which is in close association with the sun. There is the elaborate description of the sun, but in addition there is the constant repetition of the word, five times within twelve lines:

1. Rested the broad bright Sun
2. Betwixt us and the Sun
3. And straight the Sun was flecked with bars
4. Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun
5. Are those *her* ribs through which the Sun.[20]

The whole passage, by means of the iteration, is devoted to the emotional equating of the sun and the death-bark.[21]

Then the "Sun's rim dips," and we have the full and beautiful description of the rising of the "star-dogged Moon." But the moon does not bring relief; instead "At the rising of the Moon," as specified by the placement of the Gloss,

> *Fear at my heart, as at a cup,*
> *My life-blood seemed to sip!*

And immediately after, in the moonlight, the fellow mariners curse the Mariner with a look, and, one after another, fall down dead. The fact of these unhappy events under the aegis of the supposedly beneficent moon raises a question: Does this violate the symbolism of the moon? I do not feel that the poem is inconsistent here. First, if we accept the interpretation that the Polar Spirit belongs to the imagination cluster and yet exacts vengeance, then the fact that horror comes in the moonlight here is simply an extension of the same principle: violated and despised, the imagination yet persists and exacts vengeance. Second, we find a substantial piece of evidence supporting this view, in the parallel scene in Part VI, another scene of the curse by the eye in moonlight:

> *All fixed on me their stony eyes,*
> *That in the Moon did glitter.*

But this parallelism gives us a repetition with a difference. This event occurs after the Mariner has had his change of heart, and so now when the curse by the eye is placed upon him in moonlight, it does not avail; in moonlight now "this spell was snapt," and the creative wind rose again to breathe on the Mariner. In other words, the passage in Part VI interprets by contrast that in Part III. The moonlight, when the heart is unregenerate, shows horror; when the heart has changed, it shows joy.

In Part IV the penance of loneliness and horror, both associated with the crime against the imagination (loneliness by denial of the imagination, horror by the perversion of it), is aggravated with the despising of the creatures of the calm and with the curse in the eyes of the dead. Then, suddenly, we have the second moonrise:

> *The moving Moon went up the sky,*
> *And no where did abide:*
> *Softly she was going up,*
> *And a star or two beside—*

The Gloss here tells us all we need to know, defining the Mariner's relation to the Moon:

> In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth towards the journeying Moon, and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and every where the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.

Life, order, universal communion and process, joy —all these things from which the Mariner is alienated are involved here in the description of the moon and stars. And immediately the description of the water snakes picks up and extends the sense of the stars. The snakes become creatures of light to give us another symbolic cluster:

> *They moved in tracks of shining white,*
> *And when they reared, the elfish light*
> *Fell off in hoary flakes.*

For the Gloss says here: "By the light of the Moon he beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm." And in the light of the moon we have the stages of the redeeming process: first, the recognition of happiness and beauty; second, love; third, the blessing of the creatures; fourth, freedom from the spell. The sequence is important, and we shall return to it. In it the theme of the sacramental vision and the theme of imagination are fused.

Part V, in carrying forward the next period of development consequent upon the Mariner's restored imaginative view of the world, continues, in new combinations, the sun-moon contrast, but here we move toward it by the refreshing rain and then the storm. In the Mariner's dream, which comes in the first heaven-sent sleep, we have the presentiment of the rain and storm, a dream which corresponds to the dream of the Polar Spirit which had hinted to the fellow mariners the nature of the crime: in both cases, at this instinctive, subrational level, the truth is darkly shadowed forth before it is realized in the waking world. In the Mariner's dream, before the real rain comes, the "silly buckets" [22] are filled with dew. Upon waking and drinking the rain, the Mariner, in his light and blessed condition, hears a roaring wind; then, as the Gloss puts it, there are "strange sights and commotions in the sky and the elements," presided over by the moon, which hangs at the edge of the black cloud. The moon of imagination and the storm of creative vitality here join triumphantly to celebrate the Mariner's salvation.

But here let us pause to observe a peculiar fact. The wind does not reach the ship, and the Polar Spirit, who had originally set forth on an errand of vengeance, provides the power of locomotion for the ship. Though he has been functioning as the sinister aspect of the imagination, he, too, is now drawn, in "obedience to the angelic troop," into the new beneficent activity. Not that he is to lose entirely his sinister aspect; we shall see that his vengeance persists, for the Mariner, in his role as the *poète maudit*, will show that the imagination is a curse as well as a blessing. But for the moment, though grudgingly, the Spirit joins the forces of salvation.

What now, we may ask, is the logic of this situation? If the wind were to drive the ship, the action would not be adapted to show the role of the Polar Spirit. Furthermore, if the wind were to drive the ship, the fusion of the natural and the supernatural in the terrible and festal activity below and above the sea would not be exhibited. And this is important, for here we have another moment of fusion of the primary and secondary themes: wind, moon, and Polar Spirit belong to the secondary theme of the imagination, but the "angelic troop," in obedience to which the Spirit acts, belongs properly to the primary theme, the theme of the "One Life" and the sacramental vision.

I have said that the angelic troop here serves to introduce the primary theme into the episode. Certainly, in the reanimation of the bodies of the fellow mariners, there is implicit the idea of regeneration and resurrection, and in this way the participation in the general meaning of the episode becomes clear. But the behavior of the reinspirited bodies, taken in itself, offers a difficulty. Taken at the natural level, the manipulating of the sails and

ropes serves no purpose. Taken at the symbolic level, this activity is activity without content, a "lag" in the poem, a "meaningless marvel." And the spirits in the bodies give us an added difficulty. When day comes, they desert the bodies and as sweet sounds dart to the sun. The sun, under whose aegis the bad events of the poem occur, here appears in a "good" association.

Our problem of interpreting these "good" associations is parallel to that of dealing with the moon when it appears in "bad" association. I shall treat it analogously, by looking at it in the special context and not in isolation. This redemption of the sun—for we may call it that—comes as part of the general rejoicing when the proper order has been re-established in the universe. The "understanding," shall we say, no longer exists in abstraction, no longer partakes of death, but has its proper role in the texture of things and partakes of the general blessedness. It is, for the moment, "spiritualized." I say for the moment, for at noon, the hour when the sun is in its highest power and is most likely to assert itself in "abstraction," the sun resumes briefly its inimical role and prevents the happy forward motion of the ship:

> *The Sun, right up above the mast,*
> *Had fixed her to the ocean.*

As the Gloss explains here, this event takes place when the Polar Spirit, after having obediently conveyed the ship to the Line, still "requireth vengeance." In other words, the inimical force of the sun is felt at the moment when the power of imagination seems to be turning away vengefully from the Mariner. But this crisis is passed, for after all the Mariner has been redeemed, and the ship plunges forward again with such suddenness that the Mariner is thrown into a "swound."

In his swound the Mariner receives a fuller revelation of his situation and of the nature of the forces operating about him. He learns these things, it is important to notice, in the dream—just as the fellow mariners had received the first intimation of the presence of the Polar Spirit through dreams. And the significance of this fact is the same: the dream is not at the level of the "understanding," but is the appropriate mode by which the special kind of knowledge of the imagination should be revealed.

It is in this dream that the Mariner for the first time receives an explicit statement of the relation of the Albatross and the Polar Spirit. Meanwhile the Gloss tells us that the Polar Spirit, having been assured that the Mariner will continue to do penance (as the Mariner himself learns from the Second Voice), returns southward. But the ship, which had been propelled by the Polar Spirit, continues on its way by another means, as the Second Voice describes. Do we have here an "unmeaning marvel," or is there some content to this business? An interpretation at this point probably demands more forcing than at any other, but there is, perhaps, a possible one consistent with the rest of the poem. The angelic troop and the Polar Spirit (the first associated with the primary theme, the second with the secondary theme) are both "supernatural"—as the Gloss somewhat superfluously remarks. But the Second Voice gives the Mariner, and us, a scien-

tific, i.e., "natural," explanation of the progress of the ship. So we have here the supernatural powers (of the two orders) acting by the agency of the natural mechanism of the world—the supernatural and the natural conspiring together on the Mariner's behalf after his redemption.

There is, however, an additional item to be considered in the vision, the description of the moon and the ocean given by the Second Voice:

> *'Still as a slave before his lord,*
> *The ocean hath no blast;*
> *His great bright eye most silently*
> *Up to the Moon is cast—*
>
> *If he may know which way to go;*
> *For she guides him smooth or grim.*
> *See, brother, see! how graciously*
> *She looketh down on him.'*

This is a fairly obvious definition of the role of the moon—the adored, the guiding, the presiding power.

After this definition in dream of the role of the moon, the Mariner wakes to find it shining and the dead men standing about with their moon-struck eyes fixing a curse upon him. This scene recalls two previous scenes of the poem. First, it recalls the other scene of the curse by the eye in moonlight before the redemption of the Mariner. Second, it recalls the main redemption scene when the Mariner blesses the snakes in the moonlight. With the first we have here a parallelism developing a contrast, and with the second a parallelism developing a repetition. For in this, we have a second redemption scene—the relief from the curse, which, the Gloss says, is "finally expiated." But as the spell is snapped, there is a moment in which the Mariner is fearfully bemused like one who knows

> *. . . a frightful fiend*
> *Doth close behind him tread.*

This last hint of the curse disappears with the rising of the strange breeze. It is not a "natural" breeze, for it does not ripple the water—it blows only upon the Mariner. The ship moves, but not by the breeze (presumably by the angelic troop, as before). It is the creative wind again, blowing only upon the Mariner, fanning his cheek, but also mingling "strangely" with his "fears"—a hint of the ambiguous power of the imagination. The rising of the breeze now, after this second redemption scene, corresponds to the rising of the great storm after the first redemption scene—a storm which, we must remember, was both terrible and festal in its aspect. The rising of the breeze now also recalls the first storm which drove the ship south in Part I—a parallelism by contrast, for the first storm was all "enemy" while the present breeze, though it mingles strangely with the Mariner's fears, is a sweet breeze.

Suddenly, under the sweet breeze, the Mariner descries the home port. Appropriately, it is drenched in the magnificent moonlight. But now we are to have another kind of light, too, By every corpse on deck stands a seraph-man with a body all of light as a signal to the land. So here, in the two kinds of light by which the return is accomplished, the men of light (associated with the primary theme) and the moon (associated with the secondary theme), we have a final fusion of the imagination and the sacramental vision.[23] We may, as it were, take them to be aspects of the same reality.

This fusion, with the beginning of Part VII, is restated by means of the figure of the Hermit, who is both priest of God and priest of Nature. We may look at the matter in this way: 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." As we have seen, the poem is shot through with religious associations. On the other hand, the theme of 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."* The theme is essentially aesthetic, but it is also "natural" in the sense just defined as contrasted with the sense in which nature is regarded as the neutral material worked on by the mere "understanding." The Hermit, who kneels in the woods, embodies both views, both themes.

The Hermit, however, has another aspect. He is also the priest of Society, for it is by the Hermit, who urges the Pilot on despite his fears, that the Mariner is received back into the world of men. This rejoining of the world of men is not, we observe, accomplished simply by the welcoming committee. There is the terrific sound which sinks the ship and flings the stunned Mariner into the Pilot's boat. In the logic of the symbolic structure this would be, I presume, a repetition of the wind or storm motif: the creative storm has a part in re-establishing the Mariner's relation to other men.[24] Even if the destruction of the ship is regarded, as some readers regard it, as a final act of the Polar Spirit, to show, as it were, what he could do if he had a mind to, the symbolic import is not altered, for the Spirit belongs to the cluster of imagination which has the terrifying and cataclysmic as well as benign aspect. As a matter of fact, since the Gloss has earlier dismissed the Polar Spirit at the end of Part V, saying that he "returneth southward," it seems more reasonable to me to interpret the destruction of the ship as the work of the angelic troop, whose capacity to work marvels has already been amply demonstrated. And this reading gives us a fuller symbolic burden, too, and is consistent with the final fusion of themes which we observe in this general episode. At the level of the primary theme, the angelic troop wipe out the crime (i.e., the "criminal" ship and the dead bodies); at the level of the secondary theme, they do so by means of the "storm," which belongs to the symbolic cluster of the imagination.

V

By this reading of the poem the central and crucial fact is the fusion of the primary and secondary themes. And this means that the poem suddenly takes its place as a document of the very central and crucial issue of the period: the problem of truth and poetry. I do not mean to imply that this problem was first recognized by the Romantics. It had had a statement at least as early as the Platonic dialogue *Ion*. But with the English Romantics it was not only a constant topic for criticism, but was, directly or indirectly, an obsessive theme for poetry itself.

We have something of a parallel to this effort at making a marriage of poetry with truth, in the effort of the eighteenth century to establish a "holy alliance between science and religion," an effort which resulted in such works as Hartley's *Observations on Man* and Priestley's *Disquisitions,* which attempt to give the authority of science to the religious impulse. We can see, in fact, in Coleridge's early necessitarianism a continuation of this eighteenth-century effort. But the problem of poetry in the eighteenth century had been different; the poets then had felt, by and large, that poetry was at home in the world and in society and had its proper and well-defined function. The Romantic poets, on the other hand, felt that they had to justify their existence. However great the claims they made for poetry and however sweeping their gestures and rolling their periods, they made those claims because the need for justification was becoming acute. The claim they made was that poetry gives truth; or if they were as subtle as Coleridge they sought to establish an intimate and essential connection between truth and poetry on psychological as well as metaphysical grounds. For the Romantics, as A. E. Powell says, poetry was a "form of knowledge, a form of action, the highest form of either; so high that it reached their object without their laboured process." As Keats said: "What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth." Over and over again, Blake affirmed that "Imagination is Eternity."

The problem of establishing a holy alliance between poetry and truth was, however, terribly complicated by the fact that truth itself was not one and simple. There were two truths, and they themselves might very well be in deadly competition: the truth of religion and the truth of science. The poets faced this situation in their various ways in a time when one body of opinion held that with the development of science, serious minds will turn from poetry, whose harmony "is language on the rack of Procrustes," whose sentiment "is canting egotism in the mask of refined feeling," whose passion "is the commotion of a weak and selfish mind," whose pathos "is the whining of an unmanly spirit," and whose sublimity "is the inflation of an empty head."

We know how Shelley responded to these words of Peacock with his *Defence of Poetry,* wherein he asserts that poetry "is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred." We know how Wordsworth had almost anticipated these very words. And we know that, though Coleridge may have had a deep-rooted instinctive distrust of science, he did aim at a glorious synthesis in which all breaches would be healed and all malice reconciled. And though the distrust of science may have existed, Coleridge could at the same time find in poetry itself a field for the study of the "facts of mind" and could, as in some of his criticism of Shakespeare, shift the emphasis from aesthetic to scientific (i.e., psychological) interest. But the main problem of reconciliation for Coleridge was that between poetry and religion, or morality, for since those were his twin passions it was necessary for him to develop some vital connection between them if he was to be happy. His solution was, of course, one of detail

and not part of the great synthesis of which he dreamed. For the age presented complications which could not, apparently, be resolved into such a system. "The fact is that the problem was," as Olwen Ward Campbell says, "gigantic, and the men were not more than great. And they seem to have suffered all of them from a kind of divided purpose and lack of conviction, which undermined their strength; part and parcel of the duality of the age. . . ."

The precarious solution which Coleridge attained was, of course, one aspect of his doctrine of the creative unity of the mind, which appears and reappears in his work and which is his great central insight and great contribution to modern thought. The opposition between thought and feeling he wished to abolish. As early as 1801, he could write to Thomas Poole: "My opinion is thus: that deep thinking is attainable only by a man of deep feeling, and that all truth is a species of revelation." And Coleridge was writing in that strain long before the composition of *The Ancient Mariner,* for instance in a letter to John Thelwall in 1796: "I feel strongly and I think strongly, but I seldom feel without thinking or think without feeling." And he proceeds to connect this proposition with his own poetic style: "My philosophical opinions are blended with or deduced from my feelings, and this, I think, peculiarises my style of writing." He is simply developing this early view when he says, in connection with Shakespeare, that the poet is "a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper even than our consciousness." And this view of the process of composition was also Wordsworth's view as we have it in the Preface: ". . . the poems in these volumes will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy *purpose.* Not that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formally conceived; but habits of meditation have, I trust, so prompted and regulated my feelings, that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a *purpose.*"

In all the quotations given above we find the idea that the truth is implicit *in the poetic act as such, that the moral concern and the aesthetic concern are aspects of the same activity, the creative activity, and that this activity is expressive of the whole mind.* Now, my argument is that *The Ancient Mariner* is, first, written *out of* this general belief, and second, written *about* this general belief.

As a poem written out of this belief it aims to interfuse as completely as possible its elements, that is, to present its materials symbolically, or implicitly as an absorbed import held in suspension, rather than allegorically or overtly. As a poem written about this belief, it aims to present a fable in which the moral values and the aesthetic values are shown to merge. In other words, the poem is, in general, about the unity of mind and the final unity of values, and in particular about poetry itself. It is not remarkable that Coleridge should have written on this subject, for it was the subject of his "darling studies." He had long since written, to Thelwall: "Metaphysics and poetry and 'facts of mind,' that is, accounts of all the strange phantasms that ever possessed 'your philosophy' . . . are my darling studies." And here we have the metaphysics, the poetry, and the psychology blended, as they are in the poem itself.

The fusion of the theme of the "One Life" and

the theme of imagination is the expression in the poem of Coleridge's general belief concerning the relation of truth and poetry, of morality and beauty. We find at the very turning point of the poem, the moment of the blessing of the water snakes, an explicit presentation of the idea. The sequence of events gives us, first, a recognition of the happiness of the water snakes in their fulfillment of being—they participate in the serene order of the universe. Like the stars and the moon which move unperturbed on their appointed business while the Mariner is fixed in his despair, the snakes, which appear, too, as light-giving, participate in the universal fullness of being. Seeing them thus, the Mariner can exclaim:

O happy living things!

After this utterance, we have the recognition of the beauty of the water snakes under the aegis of the moon—that recognition being determined, we have seen, by the recognition of their place in the universal pattern:

. . . no tongue
Their beauty might declare:

Then love gushes from the Mariner's heart, the response at the level of instinctive feeling. Then he blesses them; that is, the instinctive feeling stirred by the recognition of beauty, finds its formal and objective expression. But he blesses them "unaware," and the word may be important, corresponding in this little account of the natural history of a "poem" of blessing, composed by the Mariner, to Wordsworth's word *spontaneous* in his phrase "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and Coleridge's word *unconscious* in the statement, in "On Poesy," that "There is in genius an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius in the man of genius." So we may have here, and I do not mean this too whimsically, the case of a man who saves his own soul by composing a poem. But what Coleridge actually means is, of course, that the writing of a poem is simply a specialized example of a general process which leads to salvation. After the Mariner has composed his poem of blessing, he can begin the long voyage home.

He gets home, in the moonlight, which, we recall, is the light of imagination, and in the end he celebrates the chain of love which binds human society together, and the universe. But even here the Hermit, who officially reintroduces him into human society, is a priest of Nature as well as a priest of God; and the relation between man and Nature is established by the imagination, and so the Hermit is also a priest of imagination. In other words, imagination not only puts man in tune with the universe but puts him in tune with other men, with society: it provides the great discipline of sympathy. The socializing function of the imagination was never lost sight of by the Romantics. The poet is the man speaking of men, Wordsworth declares, and Shelley says in the *Defence:* "The great instrument of moral good is the imagination," for it leads man to "put himself in the place of another and of many others," so that "the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own." Over and over again in that generation we encounter the idea, and the Mariner returns to proclaim how sweet it is to walk "with a goodly company."

If the Mariner returns to celebrate the chain of love which binds human society and the universe, the fact should remind us that the occasion is a wedding and his audience a wedding guest. But it is sometimes argued that the Mariner repudiates marriage, contrasting it with the religious devotion indulged in "with a goodly company." [25] Now the contrast is certainly in the poem, and is involved in one of the personal themes. But in the total poem we cannot take the fact of the contrast as being unqualified. At the level of doctrine, we do not have contrast between marriage and sacramental love, but one as image of the other. It is no accident that the Mariner stops a light-hearted reveler on the way to a marriage feast. What he tells the wedding guest is that the human love, which the guest presumably takes to be an occasion for merriment, must be understood in the context of universal love and that only in such a context may it achieve its meaning. The end of the poem gives a dramatic scaling of the love, in lines 591–609.

> *What loud uproar bursts from that door!*
> *The wedding-guests are there:*
> *But in the garden-bower the bride*
> *And bride-maids singing are:*
> *And hark the little vesper bell,*
> *Which biddeth me to prayer!*
>
> *O Wedding-guest! this soul hath been*
> *Alone on a wide wide sea: . . .*
>
> *O sweeter than the marriage-feast,*
> *'Tis sweeter far to me,*
> *To walk together to the kirk*
> *With a goodly company!—*

The scale starts with the rude merriment, uninstructed and instinctive. Then the next phase, introduced by the significant word *but*, gives us the bride in the garden singing with the bridesmaids, retired from the general din and giving us, presumably, a kind of secular hymn of love. Then comes the vesper bell calling to prayer. The significance of the prayer is immediately indicated by the sudden statement that the Mariner's soul—and the use of the word *soul* here is important—has been alone on a wide sea: the Mariner now sees the chain of love which gives meaning to the marriage feast. In one of its aspects the poem is a prothalamion.

But we must ask ourselves more narrowly about the Mariner's situation, even as he proclaims his message of love. He is, we recall, a wanderer, with some shadow hanging over him of those two great wanderers, the Jew and Cain. His situation is paradoxical. Now from one point of view it is proper that the prophet of universal charity, even though he celebrates the village life of the goodly company walking to church together, should himself have no fixed address, for that would in a way deprive his message, symbolically at least, of its universality. But his wandering is not only a mark of his blessed vision: it is also a curse. So we have here a peculiar and paradoxical situation: the poem is a poem in which the poetic imagination appears in a regenerative and healing capacity, but in the end the hero, who has, presumably, been healed, appears in one of his guises as the *poète maudit*. So we learn that the imagination does not only bless, for even as it blesses it lays on a curse. Though the

Mariner brings the word which is salvation, he cannot quite save himself and taste the full joy of the fellowship he advertises. Society looks askance at him. When he first returns home and is flung into the Pilot's boat (significantly by the creative storm), the ordinary mortals there are appalled: the Pilot falls down in a fit; the Pilot's boy "doth crazy go" and declares flatly that the Mariner is the devil himself; and even the Hermit has to conquer his mortal trepidations in prayer (though the priest ought to understand the artist as another person dedicated to ideal values). And even now, long after, the Wedding Guest has moments of terror under the glittering eye. The very gifts, the hypnotic eye, the "strange power of speech," set the Mariner apart.

Now, as we look back over the poem, we may see that this doubtful doubleness of the imagination has more than once been apparent. Creativity is a wind, a storm, which is sometimes inimical (as in the first storm in Part I) and is sometimes saving (as after the blessing of the snakes). But even in its most gentle manifestation, as the light breeze blows sweetly on the Mariner's brow on the voyage home, it "mingled strangely" with his "fears." There is always a strain of terror with the beauty, and in the end it is a shattering, supernatural blast which sinks the ship and delivers the Mariner to the waters of the home port even as the beneficent moon looks down.

The Mariner will be rescued and will pass like night from land to land. Let us linger on this phrase: like night. For even this tells us something. It gives us first the effortless, universal sweep, a sense of the universality of the Mariner's message which is carried from land to land. It tells us, too, by the easy, conventional equation of *dark* and *accursed* that the Mariner is the *poète maudit.* But night in this poem has a special body of associations, and with night we may have here, as a result of the long accumulation of night scenes, always with the association of the moon, a hint of the healing role of the imagination—a beneficent counterweight to the burden of the curse which is carried in the phrase. The phrase, in its special context, repeats, in little, the paradoxical situation of the Mariner.

Earlier I have said that we find in the blessing of the snakes a little fable of the creative process—the natural history of a poem of blessing. But in the end of the poem we have another fable of the creative process, and perhaps a fuller statement of Coleridge's conception of the poet, the man with the power which comes unbidden and which is an "agony" until it finds words, the power which wells up from the unconscious but which is the result of a moral experience and in its product, the poem, the "tale" told by the Mariner, will "teach"—for that is the word the Mariner uses. It is a paradoxical process.

And that paradox, the paradox of the situation of the poet, was a central fact for Coleridge and his age. The cult of Chatterton was significant, from Coleridge's boyish "Monody on the Death of Chatterton," in 1790, to the production of Vigny's *Chatterton* on the night when, as Gautier said, one could almost hear the crack of solitary pistols. In *Adonais* we do not know whether the mark on the pale brow of the last of the mourners is that of Cain or Christ,

in the "Ode" the poet falls upon the thorns of life, and in a letter to Mrs. Shelley appears the sentence: "Imagine my despair of good, imagine how it is possible that one of weak and sensitive nature as mine can run further the gauntlet through this hellish society of men." And Blake, who, as his letters and notebooks show us, frequently found himself at odds with the world, could complain:

O why was I born with a different face?
Why was I not born like the rest of my race?

Keats was, in one respect, like the waif, as Yeats said, looking into the window of the sweetshop. But where Keats is a gentle outcast, Byron is a dark and theatrical one, practicing his wild glances before a mirror and hinting at horrid crimes. And when he describes himself, the outcast both noble-minded and accursed, he describes himself in *Lara* as a figure strangely like the Mariner, with, somehow, a mysterious message and a power to compel the listener like the power in the Mariner's glittering eye:

None knew nor how, nor why, but he entwined
Himself perforce around the hearer's mind;
There he was stamped; in liking or in hate,
If greeted once; however brief the date
That friendship, pity, or aversion knew,
Still there within the inmost thought he grew.
You could not penetrate his soul, but found,
Despite your wonder, to your own he wound;
His presence haunted still; and from the breast
He forced an all unwilling interest:
Vain was the struggle in that mental net,
His spirit seemed to dare you to forget.

But what of Wordsworth, who seems so respectably rooted in social centrality and who eschewed the opium phial of Coleridge and De Quincey, the bottle of Lamb, the rancors of Blake, the Satanic loves and heroic posturings of Byron, the languors of Keats, and the shrillnesses and self-pity of Shelley? I am not about to refer to Annette Vallon or to the youthful ardors of revolution. I refer to his critical theory. He says that a poet is a man speaking to men, and affirms the universal bond, as do his brother poets, for all that. But if we look close we see that he also shares with his brother poets the fascination with the outcast, the outsider. He seeks poetry in the peasant, the idiot, the child. We know the reasons he gives, and sound ones they may be, for going to these figures, but we must not forget that these figures, too, are beyond the circle of respectable society. There is, it must be remembered, another point, which comes out of Wordsworth's description of the poet. He says, first, that the poet has a "more comprehensive soul" than other men, and second, that he is set off from them by a certain special endowment. The first notion refers to a difference in degree, but the second refers to a *difference in kind.* In developing this second notion Wordsworth, like other Romantic critics, comments on the special nature of the aesthetic experience: the poet has, he says in the Preface, an "ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed *far from being the same as those produced by real events,* yet . . . do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves. . . ."

I am not prepared, on the basis of Wordsworth's insistence on the special quality of the creative experience, to call him, except fancifully, an example of the *poète maudit.* The imagination was for him a healing power, and his life was a strenuous effort to give others something of the benefit of this power and to make poetry genuinely social. Nevertheless, he did know something of the "distress," as he called it, which occasionally accompanied the exercise of the healing power, even if his distress was a little short of the Mariner's "agony." He says in the *Prelude* that the poet, "gentle creature as he is," has his "unruly times":

. . . his mind, best pleased
While she as duteous as the mother dove
Sits brooding, lives not always to that end,
But like the innocent bird, hath goadings on
That drive her as in trouble through the groves;
With me is no such passion, to be blamed
No otherwise than as it lasts too long.

The dove that is goaded through the groves by its inward distress is a somewhat less compelling image than the Mariner who passes like night from land to land, but the idea is in both cases the same. But this description of the poet as cursed is not the only one in Wordsworth's work. In "Stanzas Written in my Pocket-Copy of Thomson's 'Castle of Indolence'" (1802) there is the description of a man who wanders the country in storm or heat or who sits for hours brooding apart from men.

What ill was on him, what he had to do
A mighty wonder bred among our quiet crew.

This man, who is compared to a "sinful creature, pale and wan," is in the end defined as a poet:

But verse was what he had been wedded to;
And his own mind did like a tempest strong
Come to him thus, and drove the weary Wight along.[26]

So we have, even with Wordsworth, something of the paradox which haunted Coleridge with special vindictiveness all his life: the paradox implicit in the figure of the Mariner or in that other ambiguous figure in that other poem about the imagination:

And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

VI

I have tried to show, by dwelling on details as well as on the broad, central images, that there is in *The Ancient Mariner* a relatively high degree of expressive integration. There may be lags and lapses in fulfilling the basic creative idea, but, according to my reading, these lags and lapses are minor. But one school of thought has always held that the lags and lapses are far from minor, that there is no pervasive logic in the poem. Wordsworth, of course, said as much, as did Mrs. Barbauld with her complaint of improbability, and Southey in his review of the piece in *The Critical Review*. Even Lamb, in defending the poem against Southey and declaring it to have the true power of playing "tricks with the mind," was constrained to admit that parts of the poem were "fertile in unmeaning miracles." And later, in defending the poem against Wordsworth's charge that it was not integrated, he again admitted that he disliked "all the miraculous parts of it."

We must remember that the poem to which all of the critics referred was not the poem as it stands before us today. I do not argue that it would have made any difference to Mrs. Barbauld, or even to Wordsworth, but Coleridge did arrive at, by the time of the publication in *Sibylline Leaves* (1817), two major changes: he added the Gloss, which should have made the structure of the poem clearer, and he revised the text. Whether or not Coleridge was led to these changes by the criticism of the obscurity and lack of logic, the revision of the text itself was in accordance with his own theory of composition, that the parts of a work should participate in the expressiveness of the whole. So we have, in the important omissions made in the last version, a purging of at least most of the "unmeaning miracles" of which Lamb presumably complained, the descriptions of Death on the specter-bark and of the burning arms of the spirits at the time of the homecoming.[27]

The charge of the lack of integration, however, still continues to be made. One recent critic, Newton P. Stallknecht, says, for instance, that "Coleridge gives us no inkling of a possible allegorical interpretation until we reach the middle of Part III and encounter the character *Life-in-Death*." But by this critic and by others the problem is centered on the role of the supernatural in the poem. Stallknecht[28] says that "moralizing or the use of allegory in a ballad in which an imaginative use is made of the supernatural *for its own sake* is apt to seem out of place or even mechanical," and he then proceeds to define the split in the poem as one between the supernatural material and the moral which, he takes it, was grafted on the poem late in the process of composition.

This general view of the supernatural should, perhaps, be inspected in the light of Coleridge's statements regarding the place of his interest in the supernatural in his own development. We do not have, alas, the essay on "the uses of the Supernatural in poetry," which he confidently affirmed the reader would find prefixed to *The Ancient Mariner*. But we know of the childhood passion for marvels and mysteries, fairy tales and *The Arabian Nights*, and we know what value he put upon what

Lamb called "that beautiful interest in wild tales" as an influence in forming the imaginative bent. For him they served the same purpose as those later and more respectable fairy tales of Plotinus and the other mystics to keep "the heart alive in the head" and save his mind from "being imprisoned within the outline of any single dogmatic system." Furthermore, we must recall the context in which the division of labor for the *Lyrical Ballads* was arrived at and in which Coleridge undertook to write the poems of a supernatural cast: the context was the passionate dialogue, protracted day after day, on the subject nearest the hearts of both the young men, the subject of the nature and function of poetry. It was a high theme for them, and in the discussion the supernatural partakes of the general seriousness: no subject for an idle shudder.

In the face of this situation, it is a little surprising to find it argued, as it is argued by Marius Bewley, that Coleridge's "motive, in the last analysis, was not substantially different from Mrs. Radcliffe's or Monk Lewis's," that the *frisson* is all except for some disjointed references to a moral preoccupation which appear in the poem only because the poet "could not help drawing in some measure from his full sensibility." But the moral element, even if it does appear thus disjointedly in the poem, "is forgotten, if indeed it was ever recognized as present; it is changed, choked out by theatrical fripperies." And he summarizes this interpretation by saying: "The moral value of the poem is sacrificed by the attainment of a somewhat frivolous distinction"—that of having successfully created an atmosphere of mystery.

Aside from the evidence in the poem itself against this view, a view not confined to Bewley's essay, one can go to Coleridge's own words concerning the use of the supernatural in those romances which Bewley takes the poet to emulate. Coleridge reviewed several of the Gothic romances, and was interested in them, but he demands in the midst of the atmosphere of terror and mystery a truth to nature, and though he recognizes in some of them moments of genius and a great deal of ingenuity, in general he estimates them "cheaply." He says: "The writer may make us wonder, but he cannot surprise us," if the order of nature is changed. "For the same reason a romance is incapable of exemplifying a moral truth." He continues: "The romance-writer possesses an unlimited power over situations; but he must scrupulously make his characters act in congruity with them. Let him work *physical* wonders only, and we will be content to *dream* with him for a while; but the first *moral* miracle which he attempts, he disgusts and awakens us." This was Coleridge's view in 1797, a few months before he began work on *The Ancient Mariner,* and it is highly improbable that in using materials similar to those of the romances he would not have attempted to avoid the defects which he had observed in the romances themselves.

The chief defect which Coleridge had observed in the romances is that, being contrary to human nature, they have no "moral" content. Presumably what Coleridge tried to do in his poem was to use the materials of "physical wonders" as expressive of spiritual truth, the physically improbable as expressive of the spiritually probable. The notion stated by Coleridge in the review of Lewis's *The Monk* can be taken as implying an awareness of the

various attacks on the probability of the poem, the most famous example of which appears in Wordsworth's famous note—the "events, having no necessary connection, do not produce each other." These attacks are all based on a concern with the "physical wonders" as such, a concern which neglects the "moral truth" in the experience of the human being who endures in the midst of the wonders.

Coleridge was aware of the attacks on the poem on the grounds of the improbability caused by the use of the supernatural, and when he came to the final revision he gave us, it would seem, his answer. It is in the long motto by Burnet, which calls special attention to the supernatural element in the poem. "I readily believe," Burnet says, "that in the universe are more invisible beings than visible." He continues:

> But who will expound to us the nature of them all, and their ranks and relationships and distinguishing characteristics and the functions of each? What is it they perform? What regions do they inhabit? Ever about the knowledge of these things circles the thought of man, never reaching it. Meanwhile, it is pleasant, I must confess, sometimes to contemplate in the mind, as in a picture, the image of this greater and better world: that the mind, accustomed to the little things of daily life, may not be narrowed overmuch and lose itself in trivial reflections. But meanwhile must we diligently seek after truth, maintaining just measure, that we may distinguish things certain from uncertain, day from night.[29]

It is worthy of note that this motto was added in the edition of 1817, long after the heyday of the first enthusiastic speculations on the Quantock Hills and now in the cold calculation of a critical middle age bent upon making the masterpiece more comprehensible. I have already indicated how the last sentence of the motto points to the night-day, moon-sun opposition in the poem, and ties with that basic symbol; and I take the use of the motto to be not a piece of whimsical mumbo-jumbo or a vain parade of learning, but a device for pointing at a central fact of the poem. It says that the world is full of powers and presences not visible to the physical eye (or by the "understanding"): this is a way of saying that there is a spiritual order of universal love, the sacramental vision, and of imagination; that nature, if understood aright—that is, by the imagination—offers us vital meanings. It is simply a way of underscoring the function of the supernatural machinery and atmosphere in the poem, a way of saying that it participates in the symbolic tissue of the poem.

For I take the poem to be one in which the vital integration is of a high order, not one of the "great, formless poems" which the Romantics are accused of writing,[30] and not a poem which would fit into T. S. Eliot's formula of the dissociated sensibility of the period. I take it to be a poem central and seminal for the poet himself. Though a philosopher has said that "it would be pedantry to look for philosophical doctrines" in these magical lines,[31] and though a literary scholar finds here "merely the aroma, the fine flavor," of the poet's meditations,[32] if we do look closely at the magical lines and look at them in the light of the poet's lifelong preoccupations, we may come to conclude, with Leslie Stephen, that "the germ of all Coleridge's utterances may be found . . . in the 'Ancient Mariner.'" It is central for Coleridge, but it is also central for its age, providing, not a comment on an age, but a focus of the being and issues of that age. It is, in short, a work of "pure imagination."

VII

The type of critical analysis which I have just attempted always raises certain questions. I shall state them bluntly and in the terms in which they usually appear:

1. Assuming that certain interpretations can be "drawn out of" or "put into" the poem by an "exercise of ingenuity," how do we know that the poet "intended" them?

2. If the present interpretations are "right," (a) is the poem not obscure, since good and experienced readers of the past have "missed" them, or (b) how is it that such good and experienced readers, having missed the interpretations, have still been deeply affected by the poem?

These questions, it will be readily seen, have to do, in order, with the theory of poetic creation and the theory of poetic appreciation. To answer these questions properly would require a space not here at my disposal and a competence not at my command. But it is not to be expected that a reader will accept my interpretation if I am not willing to abide his questions. And so I shall indicate, at least, the lines along which I should try to frame answers.

I should begin by saying that the questions, *as stated,* are false questions. There are real problems concealed behind these questions, but these are false because they are loaded—they will not permit an answer which does not falsify the nature of the process under discussion.

Let us take the first one.

The falsity of the first question inheres in the word *intended* as the word is intended in the context. The implication here is that the process of poetic creation is, shall we say, analogous to the process of building a house from a blueprint: the poet has an idea, the blueprint, and according to it, plank by plank and nail by nail, he makes a poem, the house. Actually, the creation of a poem is as much a process of discovery as a process of making. A poem may, in fact, start from an idea—and may involve any number of ideas—but the process for the poet is the process of discovering what the idea "means" to him in the light of his total being and his total experience (in so far as that total experience is available to him for the purpose of poetry—the degree here varies enormously from poet to poet). Or a poem may start from a phrase, a scene, an image, or an incident which has, for the poet, a suggestive quality—what, for him in the light of his total being and total available experience, we may call the symbolic potential. Then the process for the poet is the process of discovering why the item has caught his attention in the first place—which is simply another way of saying that he is trying to develop the symbolic potential. Or the original item may lead by some more or less obscure train of association to another item which will become the true germ of the poem, and whose symbolic potential may supplant that of the first item.

However the process starts, it is, of course, enormously complicated. The degree of effort may vary from instance to instance (the poet may dream up his poem in a flash or it may be laboriously accreted like coral), and the degree of self-consciousness may vary from instance to instance (the poet may or may not in the process of creation interlard

his symbolical thinking with discursive and critical thinking). As Coleridge said, and as many other poets and even scientists have said, the unconscious may be the genius in the man of genius. But this is not to define the process as an irrational process. What comes unbidden from the depths at the moment of creation may be the result of the most conscious and narrowly rational effort in the past. In any case, the poet always retains the right of rejecting whatever seems to violate his nature and his developing conception of the poem. And the process of rejection and self-criticism may be working continually during the composition of a poem. In the case of *The Ancient Mariner* we have good evidence that the poet was working in terms of a preconceived theme, and we know that the original composition required some months and that the process of revision required years.

Whatever the amount of possible variation from case to case in various respects, we can say that the process is a process of discovery which objectifies itself as a making. What the poet is trying to discover, then, is what kind of poem he can make. And the only thing he, in the ordinary sense, may "intend" is to make a poem. In so far as his process of discovery has been more than a rhetorical exercise, he cannot do otherwise than "intend" what his poem says, any more than he can change his own past as past, but he does not fully know what he "intends" until the poem is fully composed. A purpose "formally conceived" is not, as Wordsworth said, necessary, first to initiate the process of creation, or second, to give the finished poem a meaning ultimately expressive not only of the man but of his "ideas" in a restricted sense. But, Wordsworth went on to say, "habits of meditation have, I trust, so prompted and regulated my feelings, that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a *purpose*."

If the poet does not have a blueprint of intention (and if he does happen to have it, we ordinarily have no access to it), on what basis may a poem be interpreted? What kind of evidence is to be admitted? The first piece of evidence is the poem itself. And here, as I have suggested earlier, the criterion is that of internal consistency. If the elements of a poem operate together toward one end, we are entitled to interpret the poem according to that end. Even if the poet himself should rise to contradict us, we could reply that the words of the poem speak louder than his actions.

But the application of the criterion of internal consistency cannot be made in a vacuum. All sorts of considerations impinge upon the process. And these considerations force on the critic the criterion of external consistency. But consistency in regard to what? First, in regard to the intellectual, the spiritual climate of the age in which the poem was composed. Second, in regard to the over-all pattern of other artistic work by the author in question. Third, in regard to the thought of the author as available from non-artistic sources. Fourth, in regard to the facts of the author's life. These considerations cannot be applied in a mechanical fashion, that is, so as to confuse the material of the poem with the poem itself. If treated mechanically, the first, for example, will give us crude historicism,

or the fourth will give us crude psychologism—both of which confound the material with the thing created, both of which deny the creative function of mind, both of which fail to provide any basis for distinguishing the excellent product from the conventional or inept. But treated as conditioning factors, as factors of control in interpretation, the considerations named above provide invaluable criteria.

I have said that both of the questions usually raised by the kind of interpretation I have attempted are false questions. They are false in themselves, without regard to the goodness or badness, the truth or falsity, of a particular interpretation. Just as the first question is false, as stated, because it is based on a misconception of the creative process, so the second is false because based on a misconception of the appreciative process. I shall repeat the second question: If the present interpretations are "right," (a) is the poem not obscure since good and experienced readers of the past have "missed" them, or (b) how is it that they, having missed the interpretations, have still been deeply affected by the poem?

The trouble is that the word *missed* here falsifies the relationship between the reader and the poem. It implies a matter of yes-and-no. Actually, the relationship is not one of yes-and-no, but of degree, of gradual exploration of deeper and deeper levels of meaning within the poem itself. And this process of exploration of deeper and deeper levels of the poem may be immediate and intuitive. The reader may be profoundly affected—his sense of the world may be greatly altered—even though he has not tried to frame in words the nature of the change wrought upon him, or having tried to do so, has failed (as all critics must fail in some degree, for the simple reason that the analysis cannot render the poem, the discursive activity cannot render the symbolical). As for *The Ancient Mariner* itself, the great central fact of the poem, the fact which no reader could miss—the broken tabu, the torments of guilt and punishment, the joy of reconciliation—is enough to account for the first impact of the poem upon a reader. But beyond that, the vividness of the presentation and the symbolic coherence may do their work—as blessing sprang to the Mariner's lips—unawares. For the good poem may work something of its spell even upon readers who are critically inarticulate.

If this is true—if ideally appreciation is immediate and intuitive—why should critical analysis ever be interposed between the reader and the poem? The answer is simple: in order that the intuition may be fuller, that detail may be more richly and the central images more deeply realized. But in this case what becomes of immediacy of appreciation? Nothing becomes of it, if "immediacy" is read properly—if it is read as signifying "without mediation" of critical analysis and not as signifying "upon the first instant of contact." Let me put it in this way: A poem works immediately upon us when we are ready for it. And it may require the mediation of a great deal of critical activity by ourselves and by others before we are ready. And for the greater works we are never fully ready. That is why criticism is a never-ending process.

One last word: In this essay I have not at-

tempted to "explain" how poetry appeals, or why. I have been primarily concerned to give a discursive reading of the symbol which is the poem, in so far as I can project the import of the symbol in such a fashion. I humbly trust that I am not more insensitive than most to the "magical lines," but at the same time I cannot admit that our experience, even our aesthetic experience, is ineluctably and vindictively divided into the "magical" and the rational, with an abyss between. If poetry does anything for us, it reconciles, by its symbolical reading of experience (for by its very nature it is in itself a myth of the unity of being), the self-devisive internecine malices which arise at the superficial level on which we conduct most of our living.

And *The Ancient Mariner* is a poem on this subject.

Notes

1. *The Best of Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (New York, 1934), p. 687.

2. The subtitle of *The Road to Xanadu* (Boston, 1927) is "A Study in the Ways of the Imagination." Actually, to employ the Coleridgean distinction (which Lowes explicitly repudiates) it should have been "A Study in the Ways of the Fancy," for in so far as Lowes treats the subject we have only the "fixities and definities," the units of material employed by the poet in merely new combinations of material. Lowes does nothing to show what happens in terms of imaginative meaning to these items when immersed in the "deep well." He shows how, in a factual sense, these items are transmuted, how, for instance, the "disconsolate black albatross" of *Shelvocke's Voyage*, shot by the superstitious Captain Hatley in the hope of a fair wind, becomes the albatross in the poem, but he never shows how they enter into a meaningful structure, how they become organically related to each other.

3. Humphry House, in a sympathetic criticism of this essay (The Clark Lectures, Cambridge University, published under the title *Coleridge*, London, 1953), raises a pertinent question about my method. Coleridge's important critical work, he reminds us, "was all a good deal later than most of his important creative work. We cannot thus be sure how much of his critical opinion may be carried back into 1797–8 and brought to bear on his greatest poetry" (p. 92).

By way of explaining myself, I should appeal to the principle of presumptive coherence in development, the fact that, despite waverings and false starts, a writer's history usually shows us a basic line. (In appealing to such a principle, we

have to be very honest with ourselves: we have to test our congruences very scrupulously, and reason from them only when their number is massive and the negative instances very few.) I am not, however, arguing that because Coleridge held a certain doctrine of the symbol in 1817, the year of the *Biographia Literaria* and *The Statesman's Manual*, a poem written in 1797–1798 would necessarily embody that doctrine in practice. The later statements would be relevant only in so far as we can hold that those later statements represented a development of a position essentially held at the time of the composition of the poem itself. Now, there is strong evidence that this is the case.

First, Coleridge says flatly that he had become aware of the special power of the imagination at an early date, his "twenty-fourth year." In the *Biographia Literaria* (I, 58–60), he describes the effect wrought upon him by the reading of a poem by Wordsworth, a poem which exhibited "the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the *atmosphere*, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew drops" (p. 59). Then a little later in discussing the concept of the imagination, he refers to the subject as one to which a poem of Wordsworth's had "first directed my attention" (p. 64). The whole discussion of the origin of the *Lyrical Ballads* makes it clear beyond doubt that the basic conception of the imagination had been arrived at early. We also have the evidence of *The Prelude*, which grew out of these discussions—evidence that may be useful in the face of Coleridge's uneasy memory for dates.

Second, we have the evidence in certain poems. The shaping power of the mind is referred to in early poems, such as the sonnet "To Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Esq." (1795) and "Lines on a Friend Who Died of a Frenzy Fever" (1794). Shawcross points out that even in "Religious Musings" (1794) there is a volitional effort on the part of the finite mind.

Third, though Coleridge wrote *The Ancient Mariner* in 1797–1798, he worked closely on it in the period just before the publication of *Sibylline Leaves* (1817), which belongs to the same period as the *Biographia Literaria* and *The Statesman's Manual*. In other words, his careful revision of the poem apparently indicates that it satisfactorily embodies, or adumbrates, his theories of composition as held in 1817. The fact that he continued to nurse the hope of completing *Christabel* indicates the same thing about that poem. At the peak of his critical powers, and presumably under their aegis, Coleridge was revising *The Ancient Mariner*.

All in all, the evidence against this general view is based on the idea that the concept of the imagination was arrived at after the visit to Germany and the subsequent philosophical crisis. I do not deny that the crisis was real, but it seems to have resulted in a clarification of issues which had been brewing for a long time. Germany gave Coleridge form and authority, perhaps, but not the basic motivation for his final views. Yet even R. D.

Havens (*The Mind of a Poet,* Baltimore, 1941), immediately after remarking on the fact that a poem by Wordsworth had provoked Coleridge to speculation about the imagination, proceeds to say that "this revolutionary conception of the imagination" was "probably derived from Kant" (p. 206). For a discussion of the date of Coleridge's study of Kant, and of the needs which led him to accept Kant, see René Wellek, *Kant in England* (Princeton, 1931), pp. 69–73.

Elsewhere in his book, Mr. House considers the idea that the poem itself "is part of the experience which led Coleridge into his later theoretic statements (as of the theory of the Imagination) rather than a symbolic adumbration of the theoretic statements themselves." It is certainly true that the poem is an element in the development of the critical theory; but it also seems true that the poem is a manifestation of that development. In practice I simply do not see how we can distinguish between these two things; they are aspects of a single process. What I am finally concerned to do, irrespective of any technical argument about the nature of symbolism, is to establish that the "import" of the poem is consistent with the declarations of the criticism, and to explore the significance of this consistency.

4. In a letter dated February 5, 1797, Lamb refers to the poem as "Your *Dream*" (*Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* ed. E. H. Coleridge [Oxford, 1912], I, 169). The poem is, in fact, a kind of parallel to *The Ancient Mariner* in so far as it concerns a violation of Nature: a woodsman cuts down a tree and kills a nest of young ravens, timber from the tree is built into a ship, and when a storm sinks the ship the father raven exults in his revenge. In the *Sibylline Leaves* version, Coleridge changed the end by the addition of two lines to take the curse off the statement that revenge was sweet:

> *We must not think so;*
> *but forget and forgive,*
> *And what Heaven gives life to,*
> *we'll still let it live.*

But in a manuscript note, Coleridge commented: "Added thro' cowardly fear of the Goody! What a Hollow, where the Heart of Faith ought to be, does it not betray? this alarm concerning Christian morality, that will not permit even a Raven to be a Raven, nor a Fox a Fox, but demands conventicular justice to be inflicted on their unchristian conduct, or at least an antidote to be annexed" (*ibid.*, I, 171). It is fruitless to invoke this note as evidence that Coleridge believed in the position adopted by Griggs and Lowes. When he here says that a raven might be left a raven, he means that the raven as outside the realm of human religion and morality is entitled to gloat over revenge. When Coleridge added the last two lines he did not add a "moral" to a poem which had previously had none; he simply made explicit the distinction between raven and man, and defined man's responsibilities more closely. Without the new lines, the poem had had a "moral"—and a very unsubtle one.

5. MX. B II, Alice Snyder, Coleridge on Logic and Learning (New Haven, 1929), p. 132.

6. "Preliminary Treatise on Method," *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* (London, 1845), I, 25.

7. See John Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* (London, 1930), pp. 142–148; and later discussion in this essay.

8. *Enneads,* V, I, 7: *The Divine Mind,* trans. Stephen Mackenna (London, 1926), IV, 81–82. Another important text on the matter of self-consciousness in creation appears in the account in Chapter xiv of the *Biographia Literaria* of the poet "described in ideal perfection." Here it is said that the secondary imagination is "first put into action by the will and understanding," and remains under "their irremissive, though gentle and *unnoticed control*" (italics mine).

9. The "huge ill-assorted fabric of philosophic and theological beliefs" can be read, according to Richards, as "an elaborate, transformed *symbol* of some parts of the psychology. . . . Coleridge constantly presents it [the philosophic and theological speculation] as though it were the matrix out of which he obtained his critical theories. But the critical theories can be obtained from the psychology without initial complication with the philosophical matter. They can be given all the powers that Coleridge found for them, without the use either literally, or symbolically, of the other doctrines" (*Coleridge on Imagination,* [London, 1934], pp. 58–59).

10. *The Statesman's Manual,* p. 437. See also "Lectures of 1818," Sections on Allegory and on Spenser (*Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism,* ed. T. M. Raysor [Cambridge, 1936], pp. 28–33). One may remember, too, the terms in which Coleridge repudiated his own early poetry: his chief charge against it is that of being—though he does not use the word—allegorical. Muirhead (*op. cit.* p. 43) comments on the abstractions which populate the poems prior to 1797, and observes that in the great poems they are "wholly subordinated to the interest of the characters and incident." But, in realizing that the great poems are not simply allegorical, he goes to the other extreme and assumes, or momentarily seems to do so, that the poems therefore have no intellectual content. He concludes with a position like that of Griggs: "It would be pedantry to look for philosophical doctrines in their magical lines." One might retort that it is exactly the same kind of pedantry to look for meaning in the "magical" events of life itself.

But to turn to Coleridge's particular doctrine of symbolism, it seems to be developed under the shadow of Plotinus. The Universe, Plotinus says, "stands a stately whole, complete within itself, serving at once its own purpose and that of all its parts which, leading and lesser alike, are of such a nature as to further the interests of the total. It is, therefore, impossible to condemn the whole on the merits of the parts which, besides, must be judged only as they enter harmoniously or not into the whole, the main consideration, quite overpassing the members which thus cease to have importance." (Mackenna, *op. cit.* II, 2, 3; *ibid.,* II, 14–15.) But the whole serves the "interests" of the parts. The following analysis can be transposed into aesthetic terms: "In what sense can we then say that the individual soul is part of the universal soul? There comes to mind here an analogy, the only one which, to speak of Plotinus, may be able to make us understand the relation between the universal soul and the individual souls. The theorem, he says, is part of the science, if one may speak thus; but the theorem, and every the-

orem, is the science itself, in all its extension and its life: fixed there, reduced, concentrated in that point: but in it all life is present, even if not explicitly expressed. Every scientific proposition receives life from all the science. . . . In the mind of the scientist, or of any other person whatsoever, the theorem meanwhile has value in so far as it is the entire science, regarded from one side only, in one of its particular configurations. . . . So that, as the theorem may be called part of the science and is nothing less, however, on reflection, than the science itself, so the individual soul may be called part of the universal soul, which, to consider well, is nothing more than the individual soul. And as the theorem acquires consistency and life in the articulated complex of which it forms a part, which is the scientific system, so the individual soul meanwhile affirms itself and empowers itself in so far as it is once more understood and once more understands the universal soul itself, from which Plotinus thinks it proceeds. The theorem is all the science, but the science in power, and the individual soul is all the universal soul, but in power" (Cordelia Guzzo Capone, *La Psicologia di Plotino* [Napoli, 1926], p. 52; translation mine).

11. I take it that this is what Susanne Langer means by the "unspeakable" in the import of the symbol. As applied to poetry, she puts it: "The material of poetry is discursive, but the product—the artistic phenomenon—is not; its significance is purely implicit in the poem as a totality, as a form compounded of sound and suggestion, statement and reticence, and no translation can reincarnate that. . . . An artistic symbol . . . has more than discursive or presentational meaning" (*Philosophy in a New Key* [Cambridge, 1942], pp. 261–262). Elsewhere, she distinguishes between the symbolic and the allegorical modes. In allegory, she says, "we have a literal meaning—the key to this being the accepted meanings of the words and sentence-forms—and a secondary meaning, which employs some features *of the primary* meaning," to express another structure. She continues: "But allegory is a direct and obvious form of interpretation. For the secondary meaning could really be literally expressed, being simply another story. It is verbally communicable, and does not really need the literal story for its expression. . . . But to treat a myth [or symbol in the sense used here] as an allegory in the strict sense is useless—for *all myths expressing the same fundamental idea are allegories of each other,* but they are formulations, exemplifications, not allegories of the concept they embody. Therefore, to treat a religious symbol, for instance, as an allegory of natural events, is merely substituting one language for another. The kernel of a myth is a remote idea, which is shown, not stated in the myth. It is only the myth which is stated in words" (*The Practice of Philosophy* [New York, 1930], pp. 156–158).

Following this line of thought, we can see that when one critic makes the Pilot's boy "equal" the clergy, to take an allegorical reading in the most absurd form, the critic is merely "substituting one language for another"—is merely trying, here very unconvincingly, to make another application of the principle behind the symbol which he should try to interpret. That is to say, the boy and the clergy

are on the same level of "story." And this transposition of one for the other does little to carry us toward the "kernel" or "concept" or root-attitude of the poem, which, it is true, we can never wholly frame in words but which it is the business of criticism to carry us toward.

In this connection William Blake has a most instructive passage: "The Last Judgment is not Fable or Allegory, but Vision. Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct and inferior kind of Poetry. Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Externally Exists, Really and Unchangeably. Fable or Allegory is Form'd by the daughters of Memory. Imagination is surrounded by the daughters of Inspiration, who in the aggregate are call'd Jerusalem. Fable is allegory, but what Critics call the Fable, is Vision itself. The Hebrew Bible and the Gospel of Jesus are not Allegory, but Eternal Vision or Imagination of All that Exists. Note here that Fable or Allegory is seldom without some Vision. Pilgrim's Progress is full of it, the Greek Poets the same; but . . . Allegory and Vision . . . ought to be known as Two Distinct Things, and so call'd for the Sake of Eternal Life. Plato has made Socrates say that Poets and Prophets do not know or Understand what they write or Utter; this is a most Pernicious Falsehood. If they do not, pray is an inferior kind to be call'd Knowing? Plato confutes himself" (from "Blake's Catalogue of Pictures," *The Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes [London, 1925], III, 145–46).

12. Humphry House (*op. cit.*, p. 108) says of my use of symbolism in interpreting the poem: "I suggest that if we accept the term 'symbol' we must allow a freer, wider, less exact reference; and that it is probably wiser to drop the term altogether. Mr. Warren himself fully allows for the possibility (even likelihood) that Coleridge did not *consciously* use symbols at all. This is consistent with Coleridge's recognition of the unconscious element in the workings of genius; but it does not therefore follow that there was a latent precision waiting for critics to elucidate."

There are several notions here. One is a technical consideration having to do with the use of the term *symbol*. I do not, as a matter of fact, feel wedded to the term: I mean it only as an image of deep import, using the word *image* in a broad sense to include event, etc. But if we discard the term *symbol*, we still have the problem of image and import. Aren't we back, for practical, immediate purposes, where we started?

Another notion above has to do with the discomfort at what is taken to be my exactness of reference and precision in interpreting the poem. I, like Mr. House, feel discomfort at the dry, schematic reading of this poem—or any poem. I, like Mr. House, take the import of this poem, and of individual items in the poem, to be massive and deep—"condensed," as I have said above; and like him I feel that when we come to the business of stating discursively that import we inevitably violate the richness of the poetic object as experienced. The violation is inevitable because we are transferring elements of the synthetic imagination into an incommensurable dimension of analysis. We are, however, committed, willy-nilly, to the attempt analytically to understand poetry: we are rational beings, and we take poetry to be, in its deepest sense, rational—that is, to have a struc-

ture, and a structure that reflects, embodies, and clarifies the secret structure of the human soul and human experience. The degree of consciousness in the creation of a poem is not necessarily relevant to its import; the real question is how fully, deeply—and veraciously because deeply—the poem renders the soul and the soul's experience, and thus enables us to understand it by living into its structure as projected in the structure of the poem. The only test of what, to use my critic's word, is "latent" in a poem is the test of coherence. (See Section VII of this essay.) In trying to determine what is latent, we may learn that the discipline of our ordinary analytic understanding, with its apparently, and often really, barren attempts at "precision," can sometimes be a step toward that deeper, fulfilling experience which we finally expect from the poem.

The same unease at my attempts at "precision" is implied elsewhere: "What happens in the poem is that the images gather their meaning by progressively rich associations, by gradual increment, and that exact equation is never fully demanded, even though the association is ordered and controlled" (p. 97). Now, I think this an admirable description of the poetic process—and a good Coleridgean one, to boot—and also an admirable description of the way a reader may very well experience a poem. But—and here is a big *but*—if the associations are "ordered and controlled," then aren't we committed to try to understand the nature of the order and control? This need not commit us to "exact equations," but it does commit us to the attempt to disentangle, or rather to precipitate from the solution which is the poem, the elements participating in the import of the poem. Furthermore, we must do this as "exactly" as possible, even while realizing the limitations of the dimension in which we necessarily work.

A more radical criticism of my treatment than that by Mr. House is implied in Elisabeth Schneider's very valuable and provocative *Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan* (University of Chicago Press, 1953). Her attacks on my views may be sorted out as follows:

(1) *Coleridge had no systematic theory of symbolism, and "naturally thought in other terms than those of dark symbol"* (p. 256).

To begin, not too seriously, the word *dark* here is a little forensic trick. But be that as it may, I don't think that the depth and coherence of a poem depend on a poet's theory—if they did, there would be very few deep and coherent poems. It is more likely, as a matter of fact, that the theory will develop from the poetry than the poetry from the theory, or that, at least, the writing of the poetry and the development of the theory will be aspects of the same process.

The import of a poem does not depend on critical theory, and its availability for the reader does not depend—and should not depend—on our acquaintance with the poet's critical theory as such. For whatever it may signify, I may say that my basic interpretation of *The Ancient Mariner* was arrived at before I had made a systematic study of Coleridge's theory of symbolism. Some elaboration of the interpretation occurred along the way, but I cannot say how much as a logical exfoliation of the idea as I lived longer with the poem or how

much as a consequence of the study of Coleridge's theory. In any case, with humility in front of Miss Schneider's learning, I still do not find Coleridge's theory quite so irresponsible as she takes it to be. There are confusions, waverings, and lags in it, perhaps more than I am aware of, but even so, we cannot, it seems to me, deny the ideas and insights embodied in it.

(2) The Ancient Mariner *is not the sort of poem (presumably because it is developed from the ballad tradition) in which Coleridge would have expressed his serious ideas.* Miss Schneider says: "In *The Ancient Mariner* the verse itself seems more consonant with Coleridge's remark that the poem has too much moral than with any elaborate cosmic interpretation: its movement does not strike my ear as sufficiently grave to bear the weight of all the meanings that have been bestowed upon it" (pp. 259–60). I honestly don't know what Miss Schneider really means to say here. I believe that what follows is a fair summary of what she actually does say.

Coleridge says the poem has "too much moral."
It does have too much moral—presumably for a poem in the ballad tradition.
Presumably because it is a poem in the ballad tradition, its movement is not "sufficiently grave" to bear the weight of the moral (i.e., the "weight of all the meanings").
But it doesn't have any meanings anyway; they have merely been "bestowed" upon it, presumably by critics.

So we get the final contradictory idea that the meanings have been merely "bestowed"—even though we start by accepting Coleridge's remark that the poem really has "too much" moral. Or perhaps Miss Schneider isn't making any connection between "moral" and "meanings." In that case, we may not have self-contradiction, but what do we have?

Let us lay aside, however, the question of what the author wants to say in the whole sentence, and fix on one of the individual ideas. Miss Schneider says that her ear tells her that this verse is not "sufficiently grave" to bear the weight of serious meaning. One might remark that if Miss Schneider is going to resort merely to her ear, then we may all resort merely to our ears and the devil take the hindmost. But more seriously, does her ear really tell her that the following lines are not sufficiently grave to bear serious meaning?

> *O happy living things! no tongue*
> *Their beauty might declare:*
> *A spring of love gushed from my heart*
> *And blessed them unaware:*

Or:

> *O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been*
> *Alone on a wide sea:*
> *So lonely 'twas, that God himself*
> *Scarce seemed there to be.*

Miss Schneider does have a good ear, as her analysis of some of the verse of *Kubla Khan* in-

dicates, but here, anxious to grab another piece of evidence for her argument, she cruelly slanders that innocent member.

Continuing in her line of argument, she says in her next sentence that when Coleridge "planned to write on great or cosmic themes" he never thought of using "minor poetic forms," and mentions some of his abortive projects on a grandiose scale (p. 260). But the mere fact that Coleridge couldn't write those epics seems to indicate, among other things, that his mind didn't work that way. However much his ambition urged him to draw up such projects, his genius simply wasn't of that order. Though his genius wasn't up to the epics, there is no reason to assume that his native seriousness—and ambition—was less when that genius did come to fulfill itself on a more modest scale. And I see no reason to assume that a minor poetic form, in this case the ballad, would not be found worthy of serious development and serious freighting. In fact, there is some evidence for this in Coleridge's admiration for Wordsworth, who often worked in terms of a very simple tradition.

(3) The Ancient Mariner *does not demand the kind of reading which I have tried to give it.*

Presumably Miss Schneider wants us to take the poem innocently. So do I: that is the only way to start to take any poem. But we have to see where our innocence will lead us—and we have to remember to keep on trusting our innocence all the way, down no matter how unexpected, and perhaps dark, a track. Miss Schneider says, however, that the track doesn't run very far in *The Ancient Mariner;* the poem doesn't demand much of our innocence. "Symbolic meaning" is not to be expected here.

"Symbolic meaning," she says, "becomes 'translucent' [only] when the poet alters the course of nature or heightens or distorts certain features of his subject in ways not accounted for by the surface meaning alone, when a particular emphasis not otherwise explicable is laid upon a word or image, or when his verse form takes on a special character that is intelligible only through a symbolic meaning" (p. 261). Are we to understand that Miss Schneider maintains that in *The Ancient Mariner* the poet does *not* alter the course of nature or distort any matters in a way not accounted for by the "surface meaning alone," and does *not* lay particular emphasis upon certain images in a way not explicable at the surface level? If she does maintain this, it would be nice to know what her "surface," or other, meaning of the poem would be, and I cannot but feel that some burden of proof is on her to give us a reading that proves no significant distortions or heightenings, or special emphases, to exist in the poem.

(4) Miss Schneider lumps the kind of reading which I have tried to do—"symbolic," if you will—with studies such as those of G. Wilson Knight and Maud Bodkin, and says that the "conscious symbol-seeking of critics or psychoanalysts," rarely succeeds in "salting the tail" of the "invisible bird," her image for the subconscious forces lurking beneath the "surfaces of our thought and feeling" (p. 260). Without reference to how well or how badly Mr. Knight, Miss Bodkin, and I have done our work, the point here is that Miss Schneider confuses two very different kinds of study, and this confusion, it seems to me, haunts all her theorizing, or implied theorizing, about the creative

process. Mr. Knight and Miss Bodkin are, if I remember them correctly, trying to give a psychoanalytic reading of poetry; the symbols they are talking about are psychoanalytic symbols. What I am trying to do is to talk about poetic images and import—which may or may not overlap with the psychoanalytic symbols.

This matter is best discussed by thinking of the distinction between the reverie of wish-fulfillment and the reverie of any kind of creative activity. Miss Schneider makes the distinction: "The intense concentration of the act of composing does indeed bear some likeness to reverie. . . . But it is creative *will* that is at work and not the *wish*-fulfilment reverie of certain psychologico-aesthetic theories" (pp. 276–77).

I think that Miss Schneider is perfectly right here—and, incidentally, her notion of the will seems consistent with Coleridge's own. But we have to ask how the will works in relation to creative reverie. In a rough and ready, and tentative, way, I should hazard this: The poet wants to make a poem and is acting on his desire—is *willing* a poem. In his state of concentration certain things float into his mind; but these things are *unwilled*, for he cannot deliberately summon up any particular item; if he knew what to summon up, his work would already be done. He can envisage only the *kind* of thing, as it were, which he needs: he may see the shape of the blank spot, but he can't see—he can only feel—what ought to fill it. He can, however, reject by *will* whatever items are unsatisfactory, and he continues this process in the gradual envisagement of what he is creating. In general, he *wills* the poem. In particular, he *wills* the rejection of individual items.

In the wish-fulfillment reverie there is merely indulgence, no developing envisagement of a thing being created. The wish-fulfillment reverie is responsive only to the wish, and is merely an expression of the unconscious. The creative reverie, on the other hand, by envisagement and veto—by *will*, if you like—is responsive to various demands. It is, first, responsive to the "whole man"—to his total value-system, with its long-range as well as its short-range satisfactions. It may not adequately express this "whole man," and may even falsify him, but it cannot ignore him. Second, the creative reverie is responsive to the objective world, in respect to considerations of congruence, probability, association, etc. Third, the creative reverie is responsive to the laws of the medium, whatever that medium may be—paint, verse, mathematics, etc. The creative reverie is a massive, fluid process seeking objectification in a form that over-passes appetite.

To go further, the wish-fulfillment reverie is a surrender to the needs of the unconscious, while the creative reverie is, in the end, a liberation from the compulsiveness of the unconscious. This is not to say, however, that the creative reverie denies the needs of the unconscious, but that it gives new contexts to the images arising from the unconscious and criticizes projections of it, and in that process "liberates."

This is a way of saying that the unconscious does give materials on which the creative reverie works. The critical mischief starts when we confound those "materials" with the poem made from the materials. In any poem there may be lags, over-lays, and undigested chunks of material, but the poem, in so far

as it is a good poem, survives all this by the fact of having been "created." The study of the "materials," the sort of study which Miss Bodkin and Mr. Knight, for instance, have undertaken, may lead to enlightenment in so far as it enables us to distinguish between the material of the poem and the poem itself, to understand better how such material may be absorbed, and to understand better the process of its transformation into new meanings.

I heartily agree with Miss Schneider that a poem is not a form of automatic writing. It so happens that for years I had had a nagging suspicion that Coleridge's account of the origin of *Kubla Khan* oversimplified matters. I was prepared to admit that he may have had a dream start—possibly verbal—but my guess was that then, or later, he moved over into the more ordinary process of composition to finish up. I was the more prepared to admit this because I had once dreamed up part of a poem—alas, not *Kubla Khan*—and then finished it later in colder blood. So Miss Schneider's argument about the origins of *Kubla Khan* falls on ready ground; and I think her interpretation of the poem is masterly. But for the life of me I don't see how proving that Coleridge was not asleep when he dreamed up *Kubla Khan* proves anything except that Coleridge was not asleep. I don't see how it tells us anything about the nature of the creative process, or the nature of poetry.

13. Letter to George Coleridge, April, 1798, *Letters*, I, 241–242. We also find a text on the matter of sin and grace in "Sonnet on Receiving a Letter Informing Me of the Birth of a Son." And if we look to the nightmare in Stanza VI of "Ode to the Departing Year," we find the same type of imagery which appears in the guilt dreams of "The Pains of Sleep," and which Meyer H. Abrams (in *The Milk of Paradise*, Cambridge, 1934) attributes to opium; the opium source of the imagery presumably means a guilt association. But see Schneider (*op. cit.*).

Thus far I have tried to show, in attacking the notion that the Mariner is passive and that the killing of the Albatross can therefore have no moral content, that Coleridge was not committed to necessitarianism in any sense which would make it inevitable in the poem. But there is another line of approach to the question. If it be assumed that Coleridge did accept the doctrines of David Hartley and Joseph Priestley, it still does not follow that the Mariner's act is without moral content, for we must do Coleridge the honor of supposing that he read the works of his masters a little more closely than some of the critics seem to have done. In Priestley's *Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated* (Birmingham, 1782, pp. 142–164), there occurs a section entitled "Of the Nature of Remorse of Conscience, and of Praying for the Pardon of Sin, on the Doctrine of Necessity," which really develops Proposition XV of Chapter I of Part II of Hartley's *Observations on Man*. Priestley writes: "It is acknowledged that a necessarian, who, as such, believes that, strictly speaking, *nothing goes wrong*, but that everything is under the best direction possible . . . cannot accuse himself of having done wrong in the ultimate sense of the words. He has, therefore, in this strict sense, nothing to do with repentance, confession, or pardon, which are all adapted to a different, imperfect, and fal-

lacious view of things. . . . In the sublime, but accurate language of the apostle John, he will *dwell in love,* he will *dwell in God,* and *God in him;* so that, *not committing any sin,* he will have nothing to repent of. He will be *perfect, as his heavenly father is perfect.*" But man does not live at that level of enlightenment and "because of influences to which we are all exposed" cannot constantly refer "everything to its primary cause." Therefore, he will "feel the sentiments of shame, remorse, and repentance, which arise mechanically from his referring actions to himself. And, oppressed with a sense of *guilt* he will have recourse to that *mercy* of which he will stand in need." Since no man, except for rare moments in the seasons of retirement and meditations, is ever more than an "imperfect necessarian," all men have the experience of sin and remorse, and the sin, for mortal man who cannot see the complete pattern, has a content, and the content is the "almost irrevocable debasement of our minds by *looking off from God, living without him* . . . and *idolizing ourselves and the world;* considering other things as *proper agents* and *causes;* whereas, strictly speaking, there is but *one cause,* but *one sole agent* in universal nature. Thus . . . all vice is reducible to idolatry. . . ." Thus at the level of mortal experience, the level at which the Mariner must live, his shooting of the Albatross would be an act of pride, of self-idolatry—the very word Coleridge uses later in describing Original Sin.

The point I am trying to make is, finally, this: Even on the view that Coleridge is influenced by the doctrines of the necessitarians, the killing of the Albatross still has, at the level of experience, a moral content and is not to be dismissed as merely a wanton or thoughtless act. It is an act for which, at the level of experience, man takes responsibility, for, as Priestley somewhat whimsically puts it, at the end of his chapter on guilt, "If . . . we cannot habitually ascribe *all* to God, but a part only, let it be (and so indeed it naturally will be) that which is *good;* and if we must ascribe anything to ourselves, let it be that which is *evil.*"

There is, indeed, a shadowy relation between the vision of love to which the Mariner attains and the moments of vision which the necessitarians describe—the "self-annihilation" of Hartley—but the mystics had given Coleridge more rapturous descriptions of that state of bliss. Furthermore, the one thing that the poem does *not* establish is the notion that the crime and the subsequent horror are really part of a good; the Mariner never praises God for having given him the evil as a concealed good; instead, the horror of the crime and its consequences is never completely overpassed, and the agony of the Mariner continues to return at its uncertain hour. This is definitely not the way a poet of necessitarianism should end his tale.

14. *Letters of Charles Lamb,* ed. E. V. Lucas (London, 1935), I, 95. R. C. Bald ("Coleridge and *The Ancient Mariner:* Addenda to *The Road to Xanadu,*" in *Nineteenth-Century Studies* [*Ithaca,* 1940], p. 16) quotes from Lamb's letter and reports that Coleridge had already entered in his notebook (Gutch memorandum book, f. 21a) the topic for a projected poem: "The Origin of Evil, an Epic Poem." But Bald does not connect this with *The Ancient Mariner.* He says: "Some time in 1797,

however, the subject changed; one of his other projects drew his attention to a more appropriate theme." But the case seems to be that Coleridge changed his subject, his fable, but not his theme.

There is also evidence of a more personal nature that Coleridge was obsessed by fear and guilt even before the full addiction to opium. For instance, there is his autobiographical note of January 11, 1805: "It is a most instructive part of my Life the fact, that I have been always preyed on by some Dread, and perhaps all my faulty actions have been the consequences of some Dread or other in my mind from fear of Pain, or Shame, not from prospect of Pleasure." And Coleridge lists the numerous dreads, from the boyhood horror of being detected with a sore head, through "a short-lived Fit of Fears from sex," to the "almost epileptic night-horrors in my sleep" (Bald, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–27).

Our knowledge of the poet's personal background helps us to define his dominant theme, but the critical argument can be rested on perfectly objective evidence in the poems themselves. Coleridge longed for the vision of universal love of "Religious Musings" or of the end of *The Ancient Mariner,* but we also have in "The Eolian Harp" the picture of the "sinful and most miserable man," who is "wilder'd and dark," and the nightmare in Section VI of the "Ode to the Departing Year," not to mention the later *Christabel,* "The Pains of Sleep," and *The Ancient Mariner* itself.

15. *Aids to Reflection,* pp. 268–290; quotation on p. 287. Coleridge's emphasis later on the mystery of Original Sin may find a strange echo in the famous remark about *The Ancient Mariner* in the *Table Talk,* to the effect that the poem, as a work of pure imagination, should have had no more moral than the tale in *The Arabian Nights* of the "merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up and says he must kill the aforesaid merchant *because* one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son." But this account of the story of "The Genie and the Merchant" from the First Night, is not accurate. In fact, the careless date shell had killed the son of the genie. When the merchant begs for pity, the genie exclaims: "No mercy! Is it not just to kill him that has killed another?" And when the merchant then pleads his own lack of evil intention, the genie replies, "I must kill thee since thou hast killed my son." What is important here may be that the story referred to from *The Arabian Nights* is not merely a tale of the miraculous, but is one dealing with a random act and its apparently incommensurable punishment, much on the order of that in *The Ancient Mariner.* The mystery of sin and punishment is again before us. There is even a faint hint of a theological parallel with Christianity, the avenging Father and the Son who suffers at the hand of man. One can see why, perhaps, this particular story sprang to Coleridge's mind. But what did he mean by the statement about the moral and the use of this story as an example? He never said, we must remember, that his own poem should be meaningless or be without a "moral." He simply said that the moral should be less obtrusive. Then he offers an example of a story wherein a mysterious factor in life is caught up without any

rationalization. It may be objected that Coleridge, after all, didn't have the story straight. The error, of course, may well have been that of Henry Nelson Coleridge, who had the habit of putting down after reaching home the remarks of his distinguished kinsman (see Preface to *Table Talk*), and whose memory of *The Arabian Nights* may well have been less perfect than that of Coleridge, to whom the book had been at one time almost a devotional work. But assuming that the error is Coleridge's, we do not necessarily assume that he mistook the fundamental, mysterious drift of the tale. For a discussion of the moral significance of the story, see House, *op. cit.*, pp. 90–92.

16. P. 458. If we transfer the terminology here to the pattern of *The Ancient Mariner*, we can describe the poem as the progression of the will from abstraction and self-idolatry to the state of immanence which expresses itself as wisdom or love—those being, as Coleridge says in the passage, two aspects of the same power, the "intelligential" and the "spiritual." We may observe that, in the poem, the punishment for the sin of self-idolatry, for the resolve of the will to find in itself alone "one absolute motive," is fitted with Dantesque precision to the nature of the crime. It is, in fact, a mere extension of the crime. It is loneliness. And when the Mariner bites his own arm for the blood to drink, we have the last logical extension of "self-idolatry" converted to its own punishment.

17. The crime presented in *The Ancient Mariner*, the crime of self-assertion in the face of Law, was of peculiar appeal to the Romantics. *"Le sentiment presque ineffable, tant il est terrible, de la joie dans la damnation,"* says Baudelaire in his essay on *Richard Wagner et Tannhauser à Paris*. Another example is Shelley's interest in the crime of incest and his comments on the "poeticality" of the topic. The crime against an animal is, of course, a special case of this self-assertion, the perversity of pride. Baudelaire, in his essay on Poe, quotes his own translation of the passage given in the text from "The Black Cat" (*Revue de Paris*, March and April, 1852). Flaubert's *Légende de saint Julien l'hospitalier* is another example of this twisted rendering of the Hymn of Saint Francis or the "jubilate Agno" of Christopher Smart.

18. What of the crew? The poem says the souls "fled to bliss or woe," and that is all we have in explicit terms. But the bodies remain to be inspirited by the angelic troop. Marius Bewley ("The Poetry of Coleridge," *Scrutiny*, VIII, 406–420) comments that this episode bears a reminiscence of the Incarnation and the Resurrection, and is a further emphasis on the controlling principle of love which springs from God. But he might have gone further and pointed out that, in the general structure of the poem, these associations define the inspiriting of the corpses as an act parallel to the spiritual rebirth experienced by the Mariner. It is another example of the repetition and counterpoint in the organization of the poem. But Bewley's whole view is that the poem is basically incoherent.

19. "I never find myself alone with the embracement of rocks and hills . . . but my spirit courses, drives, and eddies like a leaf in Autumn; a wild activity of thoughts, imaginations, feelings, and impulses of motion, rises up within me; a sort of *bottom-wind*, that blows to no point of the compass, comes from I know not whence, but agitates the whole of me; my whole being is filled with waves that roll and stumble . . ." (quoted by A. E.

Powell, *The Romantic Theory of Poetry* [London, 1926], p. 99). Here Coleridge uses the storm at sea as an image to describe the state of imaginative excitement provoked by the contemplation of nature—the storm he welcomed and was to long for in the later years when the wind blew no more. I am indebted to Maud Bodkin (*Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* [Oxford, 1934], pp. 35–36) for the original suggestion for the interpretation of the wind and storm in the poem. She writes: "So, also, the image of a ship driving before the wind is used by him to express happy surrender to the creative impulse. 'Now he sails right onward' he says of Wordsworth engaged upon *The Prelude*, 'it is all open ocean and a steady breeze, and he drives before it.' In *The Ancient Mariner* the magic breeze, and the miraculous motion of the ship, or its becalming, are not, of course, like the metaphor, symbolic in conscious intention. They are symbolic only in the sense that, by the poet as by some at least of his readers, the images are valued because they give—even though this function remain unrecognized—expression to feelings that were seeking a language to relieve their own inner urgency. . . . We find graven in the substance of language testimony to the kinship, or even identity, of the felt experience of the rising of the wind and the quickening of the human spirit. 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' Behind the translated words, in the vision of Ezekiel, we can feel the older meaning, strange to our present-day thought, in which the physical wind, and the breath in man's nostrils, and the power of the Divine Spirit, were aspects hardly to be differentiated." But I do not see, in the light of the poem's organization or in that of Coleridge's "Dejection" (which employs quite explicitly the wind image for creativity), that we have to assume, with the author of *Archetypal Patterns*, the image not to be symbolic in conscious intention.

The image, of course, is not uncommon in other Romantic poetry. In Shelley, for instance, it appears as the paradoxical wind, destroying to create, in the "Ode." And in *A Defence of Poetry* we find the calm-wind opposition used precisely as in *The Ancient Mariner:* "We are aware of the evanescent visitations of thought and feeling sometimes associated with place or person, sometimes regarding our own mind alone, and always rising unforeseen and departing unbidden, but elevating and delightful beyond all expression . . . it is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases."

20. Though not in connection with the present topic, the italicized *her* in these lines is puzzling. A reasonable explanation is suggested by Frederick Pottle in a letter to the present writer: "In the version of 1798 there was an understandable contrast between *his* Death's bones and *her* the Woman's lips, *her* looks, *her* locks, and I have wondered whether the italicized *her* in the preceding stanzas (referring to the ship) did not get in by mistake. If so, the mistake was made at the very beginning, and not corrected in the many opportunities that S. T. C. had for revision."

21. It may be objected that the light of sunset is also, according to the passage from the *Biographia Literaria,* the light of the imagination. I am inclined to think that such an objection here would be legalistic, for Coleridge in the passage from the *Biographia* is thinking of a dimming light, a trick of light and shade, and the setting sun here has a "broad and burning face," and, according to the Gloss at this point, there is "No twilight within the courts of the sun." I take it that the Gloss is Coleridge's own way of anticipating the above objection, at the same time as he explains, somewhat superfluously, the statement that the dark comes at one stride.

22. Kenneth Burke is quite properly struck by the suggestive force of the phrase "silly buckets." His interpretation involves what he takes to be the role of the Pilot's boy as a scapegoat for the Mariner's curse. He writes: "But his (the boy's) appearance in the poem cannot be understood at all, except in superficial terms of the interesting or the picturesque, if we do not grasp his function as a scapegoat of some sort—a victimized vessel for drawing off the most malign aspects of the curse that affects the 'greybeard loon' whose cure has been effected under the dubious aegis of moonlight. . . . I remember how, for instance, I had pondered for years the reference to the 'silly buckets' filled with curative rain (dew). I noted the epithet as surprising, picturesque, and interesting. I knew that it was doing something, but I wasn't quite sure what. But as soon as I looked upon the Pilot's boy as a scapegoat, I saw that the word *silly* was a technical foreshadowing of the fate that befell this figure in the poem. The structure itself became more apparent: the 'loon'-atic Mariner begins his cure from drought under the aegis of a moon that causes a silly rain, thence by synecdoche to silly buckets, and the most malignant features of this problematic cure are transferred to the Pilot's boy who now doth crazy go" (*The Philosophy of Literary Form* [Baton Rouge, 1941], pp. 287–288).

Burke emphasizes the relation of the moon and opium, and does not regard the moon as the presiding symbol of the concept of imagination at the level of an objectified, infusive theme. As for the role of the Pilot's boy, I do not feel it necessary to regard him as a scapegoat, though I do not think that this falsifies the tenor of the poem. I would make only this reservation: such an identification would be a significant connection, as I shall later point out, with the idea of the Mariner as the *poète maudit.*

But the phrase "silly buckets": We can go at this by looking at the cluster of meanings involved in the history of the word, meanings which would have been vitally present for Coleridge and the shadows of which can be detected in contemporary usage. The old meanings of *saelig-seely,* the sense of fortunate, blessed, happy, innocent, weak, still haunt the word, and fuse with the other meaning. In the poem the phrase comes in the first dream of blessedness, innocence, and happiness, just after the Albatross has dropped into the sea, and in the dream even the inanimate objects, but those associated with the longed-for water, receive the touch of this blessedness—and incidentally this blessing of the buckets by the Mariner, for it amounts to that, repeats his blessing of the snakes,

so that even the inanimate objects share in the new sacramental vision. As for the senses of weakness and stupidity in the word, we have the condition of the buckets as empty and worthless. Throughout, of course, there is the man-bucket transference, empty bucket and thirsty man (lonely, accursed, foolish, weak man) that become full and blessed.

23. "Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew Tree," which appears in *Lyrical Ballads* and which, though begun as early as 1788 or 1789, had received its final form in 1797, bears on the general question discussed here, in relation both to the sin of the Mariner and to the imagination. The poem ends with the following lines:

If thou be one whose heart the holy forms
Of young imagination have kept pure,
Stranger! henceforth be warned; and know, that pride
Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,
Is littleness; that he, who feels contempt
For any living thing, hath faculties
Which he has never used; that thought with him
Is in its infancy. The man, whose eye
Is ever on himself, doth look on one,
The least of nature's works, one who might move
The wise man to that scorn which wisdom holds
Unlawful, ever. O, be wiser, thou!
Instructed that true knowledge leads to love,
True dignity abides with him alone
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still suspect and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart.

Here quite clearly the sin of pride is a sin against imagination, the equation made in *The Ancient Mariner*. As Ernest de Selincourt points out (*The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth* [Oxford, 1940], I, 329), Coleridge, who heard the poem in June, 1797, was much affected by it. In July he wrote to Southey (*Letters* I, 224), though without specific reference to this poem: "I am as much a Pangloss as ever, only less contemptuous than I used to be when I argue how unwise it is to feel contempt for anything." George Wilbur Meyer (*Wordsworth's Formative Years* [Ann Arbor, 1943], p. 207) connects Wordsworth's *The Borderers* (conscious pride in Oswald, unconscious pride in Marmaduke) with the doctrine of "The Yew Tree," and says of the influence on Coleridge: "The strength of the impression which Wordsworth's philosophy of love made upon Coleridge may be approximately estimated when we observe that Coleridge expressed the same philosophy in *Osorio*, and in 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere,' where, it will be remembered, the wedding guest receives this good advice:

He prayeth well who loveth well, etc."

Mr. Meyer does not make any further connection of the poem with *The Ancient Mariner*, and apparently does not make this connection except with the stanzas of the moral tag.

24. The interpretation of the poem given thus far is in some points similar to those given by earlier readers. George Herbert Clarke ("Symbols in 'The Ancient Mariner,'" *Queen's Quarterly*, XL, 27–45) emphasizes the importance of the sun-moon opposition and makes this the key symbol of the poem, but he interprets the sun as the "God of Law" and the moon as the "God of Love," and with the first associates the Polar Spirit and the First Voice, and with the second the Hermit and the Sec-

ond Voice. I feel that this view is a justifiable one, but that the exploration of the symbols has been stopped at a stage which leaves much of the poem unaccounted for, and which actually falsifies certain incidents in the poem—for example, those involving the Polar Spirit, which should be connected with the moon-cluster and not with the sun-cluster. Another study which emphasizes the importance of the sun-moon opposition is by Kenneth Burke (*op. cit.*, pp. 24–33, 33–66, 93–102). He notes that punishment is under the sun, and recovery and forgiveness under the moon. But his concern is with the personal themes, and not with the other types of theme. In this particular study he is primarily concerned with the creative process and not with the thing created, though, of course, it is difficult to treat one without treating the other. In any case, he makes some extremely valuable comments on *The Ancient Mariner* and "The Eolian Harp."

In neither of the above studies is the theory of the imagination connected with the poem. But that idea does appear in two other studies, one by Dorothy Waples and one by Newton P. Stallknecht. Miss Waples ("David Hartley in 'The Ancient Mariner,'" *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, XXXV, 337–351) takes the view that Coleridge denied the moral of the poem in his conversation with Mrs. Barbauld because the moral is Hartleyan, in her view, and Coleridge had repudiated Hartley. She interprets the poem as a strict, two-dimensional allegory of the Hartleyan progression, by association, from imagination, through ambition, self-interest, sympathy, and theopathy, to the moral sense. After the killing of the bird, imagination introduces the Mariner to fear; ambition and shame are involved in the repudiation of the Mariner by his fellows, who hang the bird at his neck; his acquaintance with death and horror appeals to self-interest and refines it to repentance; the incident of the snakes shows the development of sympathy; the return to the power of prayer indicates the transition to theopathy; the return to human society affirms the moral sense. There are several lines of comment due here. First, the author plainly misreads, as do a number of other critics, what Coleridge actually said in the *Table Talk*. He did not repudiate the moral of the poem, he simply said that its "obtrusion" was too open. So she starts her argument from a false premise. Second, she makes Coleridge a doctrinaire follower of Hartley in a way which denies the rich complexity of his development. Third, her narrow allegory leaves large tracts of the poem unaccounted for. Why, for example, does the Polar Spirit pursue the ship? What do the various storms have to do in the poem? Is there any symbolic content for the sun-moon opposition? Why does the Mariner, if he has achieved the moral sense, have to wander the world with his recurring agony? She does use the imagination as a starting point for her interpretation, but it is the imagination according to Hartley, and not according to Coleridge, which is a very different kettle of fish. According to Hartley, the pleasures of the imagination, "the first of our intellectual pleasures, which are generated from the sensible ones by association" (*Observations on Man*, [London, 1834], p. 475), belong primarily to youth, and are of value

only as they lead, as a kind of bait, to higher pleasures. It follows that Hartley has a contempt for and fear of the arts as connected with "evil communications," the "pagan show and pomp of the world," and vanity and waste of time. They are only disinfected when "devoted to the immediate service of God and religion in an eminent manner," and when "profane subjects" are abjured (p. 481). It is unnecessary to develop the point that this view, which makes the imagination a mode of memory, is absolutely opposed to the theory of the relation of art and morality held by both Wordsworth and Coleridge at the time of the composition of the *Lyrical Ballads*. In any case, if *The Ancient Mariner* involves the concept of the imagination, the Coleridgean imagination presides, as the moon, over the end of the poem, and is not something which merely serves as a starter and is abandoned after its usefulness is over.

Stallknecht ("The Moral of the *Ancient Mariner*," *Strange Seas of Thought* [Durham, N. C., 1945], pp. 141–171: slightly revised version of an article "The Moral of the 'Ancient Mariner,'" PMLA, XLVII, 559–569) presents a much more valuable consideration of the poem. His thesis is that it, like *The Prelude* (1805, Bk. xi, lines 75 ff. and 133 ff.), gives the account of the world apprehended through the lower faculty of mere reason as a universe of death and then the redemption from the horror of this mechanistic interpretation by the discovery of the imaginative love of nature, which "strengthens the human spirit, raising it also to a life of moral freedom and happiness" (p. 148). I think that this is a good statement of the general background of the poem if the critic does not mean to imply that in *The Ancient Mariner* the imagination does not participate in the final freedom and happiness and is overpassed. My criticism of the essay is primarily directed at the application of his view to the poem itself. The critic treats the idea of the poem as a late excrescence, really separate from the "fine dramatic use of incident" and the "simple and lively imagery" and the materials drawn from the books of travel; for him the poem is not "dominated by a subtle moral." In other words, he limits his interpretation to: "(1) the incident of Part IV where the spell begins to break . . . and (2) the last stanzas, wherein the Mariner is rewarded with a deep sense of human love and sympathy" (p. 151). The intention of my essay, however, is to demonstrate that the poem taken as a whole is meaningful.

Stallknecht argues that since Coleridge, in the account of the origins of the poem (*Biographia Literaria*, chapter xiv), makes no reference to any meaning in the original plan, and since Wordsworth suggested the shooting of the Albatross, Coleridge had no intention of a meaning for his poem when he began it and did not discover one until he had reached the third and fourth parts. On the first part of his argument, we can merely appeal to the poetic theory of both Coleridge and Wordsworth —a point discussed elsewhere in this essay. The fact that Coleridge did not give an abstract statement of his idea, or did not say that the poem was intended to have one, may prove nothing more sinister than that Coleridge did not envisage a reader who would entertain the theory that poetry may have no meaning and still be poetry; and anyway, it is not to be taken as a proof that the poem as

finished twenty years later would still have all the lags and meaninglessness attributed to it by Stallknecht. (A poem may have such defects, but we have to discover them by going to the poem and not by going to some remark about the origin of the poem or to a discussion of its mere materials—so much philosophy, so much supernatural machinery, so much dramatic incident, all weighed out like so much bread, cheese, and pickle for a sandwich.)

As to the second part of his argument—that Coleridge did not discover a meaning until he reached the middle of the poem—there is some evidence that the general idea which was finally embodied in the poem had been occupying Coleridge's mind for some time. Aside from the general discussions of the subject recounted in the *Biographia Literaria,* we can point to three items: First, De Quincey's remark that Coleridge told him that he had at first intended to embody his "idea" in a dream poem involving imagery drawn from high latitudes; second, Lamb's letter to Coleridge about the epic on the origin of evil (see Note 14); and third, Coleridge's statement in the preface to "The Wanderings of Cain" that the crime of Cain involved a crime against "sense" (a crime concerned with man's proper relation to nature) and that *The Ancient Mariner* was written "instead" of the poem about Cain, the other accursed wanderer. These two items of evidence indicate that Coleridge had had in mind the general idea embodied in *The Ancient Mariner* and that it involved a crime against nature. It does not matter, then, that Wordsworth happened to suggest the particular piece of narrative machinery, the shooting of the Albatross, which was to embody the idea. Further, at what point in the process of composition Coleridge happened to grasp his total vision of the poem is irrelevant; the important thing is that we can go to the poem and discover the embodiment.

25. Burke, op. cit., p. 71; Hugh l'Anson Fausset, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, 1926), p. 166.

26. I am indebted to Frederick Pottle for this piece of evidence.

27. The following stanzas are omitted. The description of death:

> His *bones were black with many a crack,*
> *All black and bare I ween;*
> *Jet-black and bare, save where with rust*
> *Of mouldy damps and charnel crust*
> *They're patch'd with purple and green.*
>
> . . . . .
>
> *A gust of wind sterte up behind*
> *And whistled thro' his bones;*
> *Thro' the holes of his eyes and the hole of his mouth*
> *Half-whistles and half-groans.*

The return:

> *The moonlight bay was white all o'er,*
> *Till rising from the same,*
> *Full many shapes, that shadows were,*
> *Like as of torches came.*
>
> *A little distance from the prow*
> *Those dark-red shadows were;*
> *But soon I saw that my own flesh*
> *Was red as in a glare.*
>
> *I turn'd my head in fear and dread,*
> *And by the holy rood,*

The bodies had advanc'd and now
Before the mast they stood.

They lifted up their stiff right arms,
They held them strait and tight;
And each right-arm burnt like a torch,
A torch that's borne upright.
Their stony eye-balls glitter'd on
In the red and smoky light.

28. *Op. cit.*, p. 150.

29. The translation used here is from the edition of the poem by Carleton Noyes (New York, 1900).

30. A. E. Powell (*op. cit.*, pp. 1–14), in following Croce's distinction between classic and romantic art as given in *I Problemi,* describes the romantic artist as one who values content more than form, who "has a practical as well as an artistic interest in his matter," who "prizes emotional experience for its own sake, and aims at enlarging men's power to experience" (p. 1). But this is a dangerous distinction in practice, for it tends to lead to an arbitrary definition of form, to a conception corresponding to Coleridge's notion of "superimposed form" as opposed to "organic form," or Blake's notion of mathematic form as opposed to living form. Dr. Boyer taught Coleridge that poetry has "a logic of its own, as severe as that of science" (*Biographia Literaria,* I, 4), and Coleridge's total effort in criticism may be taken as tending toward a description of that logic, or that formal principle. And it is a very dangerous and narrow conception of form that would equate it with mere syllogistic deployment of argument in a poem, with neatness of point and antithesis, or consecutiveness or realism of action. Who can maintain Pope's *Essay on Man* has form and that Keats's odes do not?

31. Muirhead, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

32. S. F. Gingerich, "Coleridge," *Essays in the Romantic Poets* (New York, 1924), p. 29.