

Romantic Elements and the Sublime in S. T. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

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Elementi romantizma i uzvišenoga u S. T. Coleridgeovoj

“Pjesmi o starom mornaru“

Završni rad

doc. dr. sc. Ljubica Matek

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Ljubica Matek, PhD., Assistant Professor

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Abstract

This paper deals with “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” with respect to the Romantic elements available in the poem. It will elaborate the features for which the Romantic literature is notable, and these are interest in nature and the supernatural, superstitions, and exotic places. The sublime is the Romantic element which will be dealt with separately from the other elements because of its complexity. While attempting to explain Coleridge’s understanding of the phenomenon of imagination – for which he even coined a new term, “esemplastic” – this paper will point out the importance of the reader’s own engagement in reading. After illustrating the meaning of the motif of the Wandering Jew by applying it to the character of the Mariner, this paper will conclude with the Gothic elements that are present in “The Rime”. By explaining the prominent Romantic features, and some other literary concepts relevant to Coleridge and this poem, this paper will show that only with the understanding of the literary background of Romanticism one can fully understand and enjoy “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” itself.

Keywords: S. T. Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, the Sublime, esemplastic, Romanticism, supernatural.

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Introduction

This paper will deal with S. T. Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", and will survey prominent Romantic elements that the poem contains. Due to the fact that it is next to impossible to analyse all the possible aspects of any piece of literature, and to scrutinize it from every point of view, this paper will concentrate mostly on the Romantic features of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". However, this Romantic poem does contain some Gothic elements, too, so they will be covered as well. The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance that the understanding of the Romantic elements carries. Without the comprehension of its Romantic features, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" would be devoid of proper interpretation, and would as a result fall into danger of being read as a mere adventurous poem.

First, the common Romantic elements in literature will be elaborated and illustrated using the examples from "The Rime", covering both the natural and the supernatural imagery. The first chapter will also clarify Coleridge's understanding of imagination, with respect to his ideas from *Biographia Literaria*. One more term from *Biographia Literaria* that is highly relevant for "The Rime" is the willing suspension of disbelief, which is, too, going to be discussed here.

The second chapter will have to do with the sublime, a Romantic element which is almost synonymous with Coleridge's poetry. It will show the power that the sublime imagery has over the readers. The third chapter will deal with the motif of the Wandering Jew. It deserves its own chapter because it does not strictly belong to Romanticism, nor to Gothic literature, but can be found in both of them, as well as in other literary periods. This chapter will shortly introduce the origin of the symbol of the Wandering Jew, and present the Mariner through its prism.

Lastly, the relationship of the Romantic and Gothic literature will be described, and then Gothic features that appear in "The Rime" will be elaborated. These features include the interior mental processes and the supernatural.

1. Romantic Elements in “The Rime”

Romanticism was a literary, artistic and intellectual movement that peaked in the nineteenth century in Europe. While it is difficult to unify everything that can be said about Romanticism in one definition, listing some of its general features helps understanding it. These features are the interest in folklore, superstitions and exotic places, as well as the interest in nature, and the sublime. In addition to these features, there is also one more phenomenon that the Romantic authors were deeply concerned with: imagination.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was a prominent English Romantic author, poet and a literary critic. When discussing Coleridge’s impact on Romanticism in England, Wellek notes the peculiarity of the fact that “none of the English poets [...] recognized himself as a Romanticist or recognized the relevance of the debate to his own time and country” (Wellek, “The Term” 14). Despite Coleridge not being aware of the impact he was making on the Romantic literature and literature in general, his works are full of Romantic features and are thus a great way of perceiving the spirit of Romanticism. Montgomery goes that far as to name Coleridge (alongside Southey and Wordsworth) one of “the three pioneers, if not the absolute founders, of the existing style of English literature” (Montgomery 307).

The first Romantic element to be listed in this analysis is the natural imagery. Images of nature are present throughout the whole poem; Coleridge describes the sea, sea creatures and sky in great detail to establish the eerie atmosphere. His usage of images of nature is of a typically Romantic manner, in which the human features are given to inanimate elements of nature, as can be seen in the description of storm:

And now the Storm-blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his o’ertaking wings,
And chased us south along. (Coleridge 41-45)

Besides using personification, Coleridge also ascribes genders to some natural phenomena, calling the Sun a *he* (25), and the Moon a *she* (266) in order to make them seem more human-like, personal and powerful, because it is easier for readers to form a connection with persons than with distant objects. And only when readers form connection with a poem they are reading, they can be engaged in the story that is being told in a poem properly.

Due to the amount of emphasis that was put on nature, some of these elements of nature can even be read as separate characters of the poem. However, interest in nature is not the only Romantic element that has to deal with nature; there are also supernatural elements and the sublime, which will be dealt with in detail later.

Even though nature itself inspires awe, the Romantics were aware of the fact that superstitions and supernatural occurrences intrigue readers even more. Superstitions and interest in the supernatural were not distinctive exclusively to Romanticism; such phenomena were always innate to all people and traditions. Fulford states that Coleridge's aim was to make "the supernatural seem so rooted in human psychology that readers would choose [...] to 'suspend their disbelief'" (Fulford 50). "Suspension of disbelief" is a term which Coleridge has coined and first mentioned in his book *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*. He explained that the willing suspension of disbelief "constitutes poetic faith" (Coleridge 239), meaning that the readers should consciously ignore their reason which tells them that something is not possible in real life, and rather should, for art's and poetry's sake, choose to believe in supernatural phenomena while reading, in order to enjoy the story without the burden of reality and logic that rule their world. While discussing the willing suspension of disbelief, Coleridge mentioned that he wrote "The Mariner" to present "persons and characters supernatural, or at least Romantic" (239). Fulford considers his choice of writing a story that takes place on the sea to experiment with the supernatural motifs a good choice "because his contemporaries were fascinated by the extraordinary discoveries made on recent voyages in which human psychology was put under intense pressure by isolation, danger and fear" (Fulford 50). Due to Coleridge's skilful usage of supernatural elements, his poetry really does make readers feel notions like these while reading. Moreover, feelings such as shock or awe stick with readers even after finishing the poem.

The first element of the supernatural in the poem does not have anything to do with the natural occurrences – it is the Ancient Mariner himself, or more precisely, his enticing eye. His eye is described as glittering and bright (Coleridge 13-20), which itself does not imply anything too unusual. But, when readers learn that anyone who sees Mariner's eyes cannot look away from him nor choose to not listen to him, it is expected of readers to suspend their disbelief and imagine that such a thing is possible. After the Mariner forces the wedding-guest to start listening to his story, it becomes clear that "the Mariner's narrative repeats as contrast [...] between the common and the extraordinary" (Owen 263). That is a technique that Coleridge used to enhance and emphasise the supernatural elements. The way the Mariner approaches the wedding-guest, and the Mariner's behaviour in general, fill the reader with anticipation and subtly announce that something supernatural is going to happen. The implied promise of more than just a sea-voyage story speaks "to the Wedding Guest of depth and intensity, of an experience approaching the limits of human endurance and touching the mystery at the heart of

being” (Owen 263), which shows Coleridge's endeavour to intensify the supernatural in the poem.

The element that expresses the supernatural even stronger and clearer than the Mariner is the Albatross, a bird that followed and led the ship until the Mariner had killed it. The supernatural and superstition, both of which are features of Romanticism, intertwine in the motif of Albatross. Albatross was believed to have been a good omen. In the poem, the crew believed that the Mariner had brought a curse upon the ship when he killed a bird of good omen, because after its death, the winds have stopped, leaving the ship unable to move; and there was no rain, leaving the crew suffer from thirst, presumably rendering them mad. Later in the poem, all members of the crew except the Mariner have died, not only leaving him to suffer the curse alone, but also enhancing the curse, as pictured in lines:

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they:
The look with which they look'd on me
Had never pass'd away. (Coleridge 254-257)

The albatross and the crew are interchangeable carriers of the curse; once that the dead albatross has fallen from the Mariner's neck and has sunken into the sea, it was the ghastly, zombie-like crew who served as a reminder of what the Mariner had done.

Yet, not all supernatural elements in the poem can be ascribed to natural phenomena, or human or animal beings, as were those previously mentioned. The motion in which the ship has moved after the winds ceased is also a supernatural element, as is the Polar Spirit. These two motifs also differ from the others in that that they are not just poetic devices for creating the atmosphere in the poem, but they also have a background in real life: sailors on long voyages, devoid of sleep and delusional due to isolation, used to ascribe normal things to supernatural creatures, thus creating stories that were later to be retold for ages.

1. 1. Coleridge on imagination

The supernatural is closely linked to imagination, one of the most prominent Romantic features. Romanticism was partially a reaction to Industrial Revolution, and that may be the reason why emotion and imagination were so highly valued. Feeling restricted and trapped by the newly constructed machinery and the fact that the world was changing so fast, the Romantics found shelter in imagination. Using imagination, it was possible to escape to the world where people still had their value, where nature was intact, and where supernatural things were possible. Reading Coleridge's poetry requires involvement of the reader's imaginative abilities,

so it is obvious that “the use of the supernatural was clearly meant to contribute to imaginative stimulus” (Hume 282). Coleridge himself too discusses imagination, and he in a way associates it with genius. For him, a genius is the one who employs talent, taste, judgement, but also imagination (Coleridge 21) in their work. Coleridge continues his study of imagination by implying that a person who manages to incorporate imagination into their writing process “may even render his writings more popular than the absolute reality could have done” (22). What is admirable here is the fact that for Coleridge it was not sufficient to only talk about imagination as we know it in everyday discourse; he went that far as to invent a completely new word in order to describe imagination. He introduces the word in an anecdotal way. An imaginary reader states: “Esemplastic. The word is not in Johnson [Samuel Johnson’s Dictionary (1755)], nor have I met with it elsewhere.”, to which Coleridge responds: “Neither have I” (77). That short sentence is a sign that tells that Coleridge claims to have invented the word “esemplastic”. After clarifying the etymology of “esemplastic”, which comes from Greek words for “shape into one”, and after some other anecdotes and letters, Coleridge proceeds to define esemplastic power. He identifies esemplastic power with imagination, and he explains that he has coined a new term in order to avoid confusion between imagination and fancy. Even though he does not use the term “esemplastic” many times throughout *Biographia Literaria*, its sole creation is important, because it has enabled him to separate the term imagination from the everyday context and install it in the realm of literature, and it helped in establishing an extended meaning of the already existent word.

Besides literary, there are also philosophical and ontological contents in his definition of imagination, or to say, esemplastic power, which he describes as “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” (144). Judging by the fact that he labels imagination as a living power, it is clear that he values imagination more than fancy, which he classifies only as a “mode of memory” (144), meaning that imagination implies the ability to create something completely new and never seen before, using the created fragments and unifying and shaping them into one, while fancy only enables one to store the “empirical phaenomenon of the will” (144). Obviously, imagination is an active, rather than passive power. The superiority of imagination can be seen from the rules of the imagination, which “are themselves the very powers of growth and production” (189). Nevertheless, Coleridge is far from denying the importance of fancy- he portrays the relationship between imagination and fancy by a comparison: “a man may work with two very different tools at the same moment; each has its share in the work, but the work effected by each is distinct and different” (137).

As of ontology, Coleridge tackles it by offering an answer to the core problem of ontology, the question of finite and infinite beings. He suggests that a finite being can participate in infinity, using the power of creation. He even determines philosophic imagination as a sacred power of self-intuition, with which one can interpret and understand things such as symbols (199). In the realm of philosophy, Coleridge manages to connect the idea of imagination, genius, and the process of creating.

2. The Sublime

The term “sublime” is a literary concept which was widely discussed and used in the eighteenth century. It refers to the dimension that one feels when encountering the power and boundlessness of nature. McKusick describes sublimity as something that is “beyond any limited human capacity of understanding” (McKusick 218). But, to get as close to the meaning of the sublime in a way that is the most relevant to Coleridge as possible, it is apt to paraphrase the words of one of his contemporaries, Edmund Burke, taken from his work *On the Sublime and Beautiful*. Burke states that the source of the sublime is anything that produces terror to such great extent that it seems delightful. He also connects the sublime to astonishment, describing the astonishment as a result of the great and the sublime in nature operating most powerfully. However, even though Burke couples terror and the sublime together, he emphasises that the sublime should not “have the idea of danger connected to it” (Burke). Furthermore, it is important to distinguish between terror and horror. Although they may sound similar at first, they are nowhere near interchangeable. Ann Radcliffe wrote a famous differentiation between those two. She notes that “terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them” (147).

In addition to terror and humbleness before the forces of nature that one feels when encountered with pieces of nature that inspire the sublime, there is one seemingly opposite idea included in the sublime. It is the idea of beauty. When one’s senses are occupied with something that is so great that it makes one feel small and insignificant, what follows must be a sensation of reverence towards it. Intertwining the feeling of insignificance and humility with admiration and reverence demonstrates the idea of what sublimity holds.

Coleridge is known for creating a peculiar atmosphere in his poetry, which he achieves by incorporating sublimity into it, along with some poetic devices, such as the aforementioned personification, as well as onomatopoeia, hyperbole, and a careful choice of imagery. As for the sublime, Jones states that “Coleridge’s most significant engagement with the device arrives with the ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’” (8), and he is not alone in that viewpoint. De Quincey portrays Coleridge as a man whose poetry was “shrouded in mystery - supernatural - like the ‘ancient Mariner’ — awfully sublime” (De Quincey 21). Both James and De Quincey have pointed out “The Ancient Mariner” as the poem that is a starting point for exploring the sublime in Coleridge, because it is teeming with the elements of the sublime and therefore provides a great insight into Coleridge’s understanding of the sublime.

Already at the very beginning of “The Mariner”, even before the poem itself, there is an element of the sublime. The introduction of the poem is Burnet’s text edited by Coleridge, which describes beings of the universe as something that human mind has always wondered about. If we take McKusick’s definition of the sublime into consideration once again, and recall that he connects sublimity with something for which humans lack the capacity of understanding (218), it can be seen that the introduction to the poem is a fine display of the sublime. It is so because the introduction deals with the divine beings that are far beyond human comprehension, and of which humans can only wonder about in awe, without ever understanding them for sure. Also, the Sublime in those creatures of universe is in the feeling of the connection to the world; they remind humans that they all are just a part of something complex and much larger than the world known to them.

The first Coleridge’s own trace of sublimity in the poem can be seen in the arrival of the Ancient Mariner and his crew to the land and sea of ice and snow. What occurs there is more than just a usual storm which comes, does damage and then is gone. Here, the emphasis is not at all on the consequences, they are not even described. What is important here, is the sublime feeling caused by being overwhelmed by nature in its cruel form. Ice shows no mercy, its coldness affects more than body- it takes over the whole human being. Ice surrounds the ship, and in that moment a human is bound to feel the superiority of nature. Ice is all that the Mariner sees wherever he looks: “Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken-- /The ice was all between” (Coleridge 57-58). The Mariner is so overwhelmed and terrified that he has no capacities to notice nature’s monstrous beauty. Nonetheless, he does remember it later, in retrospective.

The motif of Albatross can be read as a supernatural element, an element of superstition, as well as the element of the sublime. It meets the criteria to fall under all these categories. What sets the Albatross as an element of the sublime apart from the other two types of elements is the feeling that the sole mention of Albatross brings to the Mariner, and also to the readers. When seen as a figure of superstition, the Albatross itself does not mean anything more than a good omen. However, when read as an element of the sublime, the Albatross becomes of a greater importance. Because of Coleridge, the Albatross has a huge impact on literature after him, and it even has its own entry in *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, which says that “the most famous albatross in literature is the one in Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner”; since then “albatross” has come to mean a burden of guilt or sin” (Ferber 9). The key words here are “guilt” and “sin”, because they are exclusively human concepts. Since the sublime is always to some extent connected to the divine, it is visible that Coleridge plays with the sublime by contrasting a

divine creature that the Albatross is with solely human fabrications. At the moment when the Mariner shrieks:

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung. (Coleridge 139-142),

the fusion of the worldly and the divine happens in that that the Mariner is overwhelmed by guilt because he intervened into something that is of a divine origin and thus more powerful than him, and failed. The event of killing the Albatross can be read in a way that the Mariner tried to pry into the sublime, which has not been successful because he does not have the capacity for comprehending it. The Albatross has thus become an element of the sublime; even if the animal is dead, it still affects the ship, the natural occurrences around it, and most importantly, the Mariner. It is a source not only of terror, but also of respect and admiration, because of its ascendancy over death.

The next sign of sublimity is not so obvious because it is hidden in the lack of nature's activity and presence. When the ship is becalmed and the crew is out of water to drink, they are aware of how miserable they are without such a simple manifestation of nature: the rain. Every human, and every other biological being is made of water and needs water to survive. When the balance of the water inside and outside of humans is disturbed, the consequences are dire; in the poem the crew falls ill, and that is only the start of the curse caused by killing the Albatross. All of them are connected in the same suffering: the thirst. Regardless of how powerful and ready they consider themselves, they are weak without water, and that is the proof of how humans depend on nature. In religious context, the thirst for water can be read as the thirst and the longing of the crew for forgiveness of the sin that the Mariner has committed.

The subliminal elements already listed have one thing in common: mortal being's realization of their triviality in front of greater forces of nature. However, the next element of the Sublime, Life-in-Death, does not fit into a classical definition of the Sublime, because she is not a part of nature. She is more of a human projection and reaction to the sublime situation. Life-in-Death is appealing and beautiful looking despite her being sinister. Other than the fact that she is not strictly a part of nature, she embodies the Sublime perfectly; she is a combination of pleasure and pain. Even though she is the bringer of death, there is something about her that makes the Mariner spellbound. Some parts of her looks are described as beautiful, some as awful, but all in all, she is mesmerizing, and her general appearance is best captured in lines: "The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she/ Who thickens man's blood with cold" (Coleridge 193-194) because

they show that her influence on one's psyche is so strong, that it consequently seems to affect their body as well.

Furthermore, the elements of the Sublime are also visible in the Ancient Mariner's position when the rest of the crew dies. At that moment, he is aware of the blight of his existence. Being surrounded by bodies that once belonged to his ship-mates reminded him of how small and insignificant he is, and how abruptly his life can end. There is no force stronger than the divine force. In spite of his superiority towards the fishes and other sea creatures which he earlier derogatorily called "slimy things" (Coleridge 125), he realizes that they are worth the same, and that there are many of the same entities in the world who are connected on the level of their insignificance in front of the nature and god. Triggered by loneliness, the Ancient Mariner sees the only hope in what he calls god. Many questions ail him, and all the answers are hidden in transcendence. Left alone to wonder and wander, the Mariner, now aware that they are on the same level, praises sea creatures with the words: "O happy living things! no tongue /Their beauty might declare" (Coleridge 283-284).

3. The Motif of the Wandering Jew

Though not really restricted to Romanticism, the motif of the Wandering Jew is of crucial importance for understanding “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”. When discussing the origin of the Jewish theme in Romantic poetry, Matar explores the legend of the Wandering Jew. Even though some Romantic poets were sympathetic towards the Jews, Matar states that their sympathy does not deny the fact that “the legend stemmed from and conveyed intense hostility to the Jews”, and “its [of the legend] diffusion in English literature in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had usually served to decry Jewish wickedness and sin” (Matar 224). In spite of the early Romantic tendency to associate the Jews with sin and all things wicked, he praises Coleridge because “among the Romantic poets, only Samuel Taylor Coleridge presented a positive view of the Jews” (Matar 231). Matar then proceeds to describe the literary motif of the Wandering Jew as a sinful person suffering deathlessness because they are eternally punished for unkindness to Jesus (224). In “The Mariner”, the emphasis is not on the nationality or a religious component of the Wandering Jew, but rather on his meaning as a literary symbol.

As a symbol, he is “in almost all its forms, the story of the regeneration of a soul, of penitence and a hard long service rendered to humanity” (Briggs 137). Exactly such yearning is present in the character of the Ancient Mariner. The Mariner’s eagerness to tell his story shows that he does not tell it because he simply wants to, but rather that he is forced to spread his word regardless of circumstances that he is in. The reciprocal relationship of the Mariner’s story is visible in the lines:

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner (Coleridge 37-40),

where Mariner cannot stop his narrative, nor can the wedding-guest stop listening. At that point of the poem, the reason of the Mariner’s exaggerated enthusiasm for storytelling is still unknown. Bearing in mind the interpretation of the Mariner as the Wandering Jew, readers can spot the origin of the Mariner’s curse; after killing the albatross, the Mariner confesses that he “had done an [sic] hellish thing” (90), which certainly is an offence to god, because the albatross was of a divine origin. That way, the Mariner fits into the profile of the Wandering Jew, as he had done a minor offence to the divine, and is as a consequence condemned not to death, but to life without death. But, that is not the resolution of the problem, because the punishment in form of a deathless life would be pointless. It is the Mariner’s realization of his sin that completes the purpose of wandering around the earth. Namely, after killing the bird, decrying the creatures of

the sea, suffering on a haunted ship, and finally being saved by the providence, the Mariner finally got to see how good and kind god is to him. In return for being saved, he has to preach his story of god's love forever, as seen in lines:

I pass, like night, from land do land;
I have strange power of speech;
The moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach. (Coleridge 587-591)

The Mariner also concludes that he is not any better than other creatures that he once had contempt for. By declaring "And a thousand slimy things/ Lived on; and so did I" (239-240), he makes peace with his fate, and accepts the implied fact that all worldly creatures are the same in god's eyes.

Still, the fact that the Mariner is saved and is sent to spread the word of peace and love does not reduce his sin. The ship on which the murder of the albatross has taken place carries a curse so strong that it influences a boy who had witnessed the sinking of that ship. When the boy felt the sinister aura of the ship and the Mariner, he went mad, and compared the Mariner to the devil himself (570).

The place where the Wandering Jew in the shape of the Mariner decides to tell his story is also of certain significance. He tells his story at a wedding celebration, and weddings are always manifestations of love. Coleridge connects love between worldly creatures with love that god has taught the Mariner about, the divine love, and thus manages to connect both worlds.

4. Gothic elements in “The Rime”

Gothic literature has some features in common with the literature of Romanticism. It has developed “as one symptom of a widespread shift away from neoclassical ideals of order and reason, toward Romantic belief in emotion and imagination” (Hume 282). “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is no exception from that rule, and even though it is usually read as a Romantic poem, especially because of its sublimity which is entirely a Romantic element, “The Rime” undoubtedly abounds in Gothic elements as well.

Hume lists psychological interest as one of the concerns of Gothic writing, which he links to “*interior* mental processes” (Hume 283). That feature is certainly present in “The Rime”. When discussing the introspective quality of Coleridge’s works, Vallins notes that “Coleridge’s poems are remarkable for the extent to which subjective experience rather than any aspect of external reality forms their principal topic” (Vallins 2). The concern of interior mental process can be applied both to readers and the characters in literature, or in this case, the Mariner. As Vallins said, it is required of each reader to make an effort to interpret Coleridge, and there are “puzzles and challenges to interpretation with which their reader is presented” (Vallins 7). Consequently, there are various interpretations of the same poem, and different readers will put different topics in focus. In literature in general, that is not unusual at all, but, what sets this case apart from the others is the fact that here it is possible to read the Mariner’s internal processes, and his understanding of his surroundings. He wrestles with the forces of nature, the divine, and most importantly, with his sin and guilt, and that is where the readers get to see the psychology behind his actions. The lines:

I moved, and could not feel my limbs:
I was so light—almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
And was a blesséd ghost (Coleridge 306-309)

exemplify an interior mental process in which the Mariner reflects on his physical and psychological exhaustion.

Hume also touches on the subject of supernatural, which is generally recognized as a Romanticist feature. However, he writes about supernatural in the context of Gothic literature, saying that “Gothic novels are often ridiculed for their use of the supernatural, though no one condemns Coleridge, say, for introducing it in ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’” (284). Hume also argues that because of the fact that realism is not the desired object in the Gothic novel, “supernaturalism seems a valid enough device for removing the narrative from the realm of the everyday” (284). While he agrees that excessive usage of the supernatural can be irritating to the

readers because of their ingrown sense of realism, he finds a good spot where the supernatural can fit in without bothering readers, and that is poetry (284). It is worth noticing that Coleridge too has addressed the problem of supernatural imagery causing discomfort in readers, but unlike Hume, Coleridge does not find it that much troublesome. On the contrary, he finds a simple solution in the willing suspension of disbelief, with which the readers can fully immerse into a supernatural story. Regardless of all the characteristics that Gothic and Romanticism have in common, Hume argues that there are more differences than similarities between them (289).

Conclusion

Even if one reads “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” without having any basic knowledge of the period in which the poem was written, or, not to mention, without having comprehended the literary features of that period prior to reading, one would still enjoy it, because it is a great piece of art, and a great adventurous poem which fills the reader with excitement, anticipation, terror and sadness. But, with keeping Romanticism and the characteristics of Romantic literature in mind, “The Rime” feels like entirely different poem. In the latter case, the poem reveals the immense depth of the imagery used, and provokes the feelings that otherwise would not even be there. Coleridge really is a literary mastermind, not only in literary theory, but also in creating his own content. It would be a shame if his skilfully crafted motifs, symbols, ideas, thoughts and images went unnoticed past the untrained eye. Because of that, it is of essential importance to approach Coleridge’s poetry with the attention it deserves, and study the Romantic features beforehand in order to avoid missing out on Coleridge’s genius.

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