

# Coleridge: The Gothic as a Means to Instruction

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## **Dedication**

To my grandmother,

Ouma Marie Vermeulen.

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## Abstract

### *Coleridge: The Gothic as a Means to Instruction*

**Keywords:** Coleridge, Gothic, instruction, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, “Christabel”, late eighteenth- and nineteenth century British literature, romance, Romanticism, Coleridgean metaphysics, theology, criticism

This study has as its subject how Samuel Taylor Coleridge utilises the Gothic as a means of instruction in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel”. That is, it aims to identify a coherent instructional purpose or project evident in each poem, whilst indicating how Coleridge “converses” with the Gothic by intermittently adhering to and/or transcending many of the formulaic conventions of the Gothic topos. To accomplish the latter this study relies considerably on an historicist method, whereby Coleridge’s prose writings, such as *Aids to Reflection*, *Table Talk*, the *Biographia Literaria*, his letters and notebooks, and contemporary interpretations thereof, are utilised in order to identify his instructive projects in these poems, as well as his interactions with, and responses to the Gothic. The unique state of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth British literary sphere and its acquaintance with and – often hysterical – responses to Gothic romance further historically informs this study. The implicit argument of the study is that Coleridge not only realized the unique properties of the Gothic genre (including its popular appeal), which made it suitable as a means of instruction, but that he consciously utilised it as such, thereby mending its principal faults, for which he himself often derided the genre in reviews, letters and lectures. From this perspective, Coleridge not only imbues these poems with an instructional purpose, but he also offers them as a Gothic aesthetic alternative to the often base, popular productions belonging to the genre, which at the time generated considerable anxiety amongst literary critics.

## Opsomming

### *Coleridge: Die Gotiese as Instruktiewe Middel*

**Sleutelwoorde:** Coleridge, Goties, instruksie, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, “Christabel”, laat agtiende- en vroeë negentiende-eeuse Britse literatuur, romanse, Romantiek, Coleridgeiaanse metafisika, teologie, kritiek.

Die volgende studie het as onderwerp hoe Samuel Taylor Coleridge die Gotiese as instruktiewe middel in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” en “Christabel” gebruik. Die ondersoek beoog om ’n koherente instruktiewe doel of projek wat onderskeidelik in elk van die gedigte blyk, te identifiseer, terwyl daar aangedui word hoe Coleridge in hierdie gedigte met die Gotiese in gesprek tree deur om afwisselend aan die konvensionele gebruike van die Gotiese topos te voldoen en/of dit te transendeer. Om die laasgenoemde te bereik, steun hierdie studie geweldig op ’n historistiese metode waar Coleridge se prosa werke, soos *Aids to Reflection*, *Table Talk*, die *Biographia Literaria*, sy briewe en notas, en meer moderne interpretasies daarvan, gebruik word om Coleridge se instruktiewe projek, sowel as sy interaksie met, en reaksies tot die Gotiese te identifiseer. Die unieke toestand van die laat agtiende- en vroeë negentiende-eeuse Britse literêre sfeer en sy kennismaking met en – dikwels historiese – reaksies teen Gotiese romanse, dien om hierdie studie verder histories in te lig. Die implisiete argument is dat Coleridge nie net die unieke eienskappe wat van die Gotiese genre ’n geskikte instruktiewe middel maak besef nie, maar dat hy dit opsetlik as sodanig beoefen en daardeur die genre se grootste tekortkominge, waarvoor hy dit dikwels in resensies, briewe en lesings geminag het, te verbeter. Hierdie proses behels nie bloot dat Coleridge hierdie gedigte met instruktiewe waardes kodeer nie, maar dat hy die gedigte as ’n Gotiese estetiese alternatief tot die dikwels laer populêre produksies wat tot die genre behoort, wat op daardie stadium aansienlike angst onder literêre kritici gewek het, bied.

## Introduction

The publication of the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* saw, amongst various editorial revisions made by Wordsworth, the addition of the now famous Preface which some hold to be the de facto manifesto of early British Romanticism. The Preface, written by Wordsworth, is a valuable piece of literary criticism, which not only declares Romantic literary aesthetics, but also makes claims as to the nature of poetry, its composition, and the pleasure it affords. The expansion of the Preface in the 1802 edition furthers the important claims as to *Lyrical Ballads'* position in relation to other then current forms of specifically British literature first made in the 1800 edition. It specifically expands on the position of *Lyrical Ballads* in relation to what we today refer to as Gothic literature. In the 1802 Preface, Wordsworth writes that:

[...] the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day. For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. [...] The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse. When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble effort with which I have endeavoured to counteract it; and, reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonorable [*sic*] melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it which are equally inherent and indestructible; and did I not further add to this impression a belief, that the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success.

Scholars such as Hume, Gamer, Hogle, Townshend and Wright would come to identify these claims made by Wordsworth, as some of the earliest evidences of the apparent rift and consequent high-low dyad evident between British Romantic poetry and the Gothic. From this, one of the earliest literary theoretical descriptions of a corpus of literature to which we now refer to as British Romanticism, we see that British Romanticism from its conception deemed itself a rectifying agent in counteraction against the literary ravishes of the Gothic. Townshend and Wright, drawing from the valuable contributions made by Gamer, argue that “the emergence of canonical Romanticism in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries depended

considerably upon the rejection of the forms of textuality now known as ‘Gothic’” (2016:5). Townshend and Wright, and many other scholars, including Gamer and Hogle, have also pointed to the denigration and disavowal of the Gothic perpetuated by numerous prominent Romantic literati, as a process which saw British Romanticism presenting itself as the “higher” aesthetic alternative to the Gothic. Indeed Gamer (2000), and Townshend and Wright agree that Gothic literature, to some extent, presented British Romanticism with something against which to define itself. What is also evident from the 1800 and 1802 Preface(s) is the notion that the Wordsworth and Coleridge with *Lyrical Ballads* wished to purge the Gothic of some of its inanities, thereby retrieving certain agreeable aspects of the genre. Townshend and Wright, drawing again from Gamer, indicate that this purgative process is also to be espied in Wordsworth’s editorial “taming” of some of the most Gothic aspects of the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*; a process which was undoubtedly influenced by some of the harsher criticism of critics such as Robert Southey, and which saw the consequent editions of *Lyrical Ballads* consciously (one may even say self-consciously) turning away from some of these aspects (2016:5-7).

To this general denigration and disavowal of a genre deemed by many as corruptive not only to its readers but also to British literature as a whole, Coleridge is no stranger. Between 1794 and 1798, Coleridge wrote five reviews of Gothic romances written by authors such as Anne Radcliffe, Matthew “Monk” Lewis and Mary Robinson. From these reviews it is very apparent that, although Coleridge deemed some aspects of these romances propitious and good, he vehemently opposed other aspects. Coleridge, though respectful of Radcliffe’s genius, would in his review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho* accuse her of unvaried description. In this and other reviews Coleridge would also criticise Radcliffe’s “explained” supernatural as well as her trite delays in revealing crucial plot elements in order to excite the reader, but which inevitably disappoint (1794). His famous review of Lewis’s *The Monk* sees Coleridge attacking the voyeuristic licentiousness of the romance to a point where he warns parents of the dangers aspects of *The Monk* may hold for their children (1797). In the *Biographia Literaria*, in his lectures, letters and other prose works Coleridge attacks the genre numerous times. It is ironic that Coleridge, a Romantic poet who intermittently objects to and denigrates the Gothic, is also one of the Romantic poets most attracted to the genre in his own poetic productions.

In Chapter XIV of the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge gives his well-known explication of his role in his and Wordsworth’s collaborative and simultaneous composition of *Lyrical Ballads*. He states that of the two types of poems they wished to produce, the first – Wordsworth’s – was to adhere to a faithful representation of ordinary life and the emotions and thoughts which it might elicit from a reflective mind; the second – Coleridge’s – was to be “in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real”. Also, Coleridge’s

endeavours “should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith” (2004:74). With this description of the sort of poetry Coleridge was to compose for *Lyrical Ballads*, he provocatively points to one of the aspects of Gothic romance which awakened great anxiety in contemporary men of letters: the notion that Gothic romance blurs the line separating the novel from romance by presenting supernatural incidents, characteristic of romance, in the realistic description and language of the novel.

In poems such as “Christabel”, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, “The Three Graves”, “The Mad Monk”, “Monody on the Death of Chatterton”, “Love” and “The Dark Ladie”, we see Coleridge regularly practising a Gothic aesthetic. The poems not only embody aspects of Gothicism, but arguably make up an important part of the corpus of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century British Gothic literature. Several scholars, such as Hogle, Goh, Twitchell, Swann and Williams, have investigated the Gothic as it figures in some of Coleridge’s poems. Most tend to focus their investigations on “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel”. Although these investigations are numerous and have consequently generated a critical corpus in its own right, few scholars question why Coleridge, a Romantic poet who regularly derided the genre, would extensively utilise it in his oeuvre. To the question as to why Coleridge would create literature belonging to a genre he ostensibly scorns, there may be many explanations. The explanation which I propose is that Coleridge was not only aware, but also appreciative of the specific intra- and extra-generic characteristics of the Gothic which made it a valuable means of instruction.

In the following dissertation I shall therefore investigate “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel” as Gothic poems which see Coleridge purposefully utilising the Gothic as a means of instruction.<sup>1</sup> Identifying the nature of that which Coleridge hopes to offer instruction on, as well as how he specifically intends to do so by utilising the Gothic, depends upon a historicist method that investigates writerly intent, rather than a readerly application of various theories. The question as to whether any coherent form of “instruction” can be identified in the poems shall be answered by drawing from Coleridge’s later prose writings such as *Aids to Reflection*, the *Biographia Literaria* and *Table Talk*. In these works Coleridge divulges his ideas on various subjects, and in doing so instructs the reader in metaphysics, theology, literature, his contemporaries, and other areas of interest. Seeing as Coleridge’s philosophical prose is notoriously complicated, identifying Coleridge’s instructive project in these poems (specifically in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”),

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<sup>1</sup> The term “instruction” is meant in its colloquial sense as defined in the Concise Oxford English Dictionary: “detailed information on how something should be done” (2011:736). I use the term “pedagogical project” to refer to the specific ways in which Coleridge aims to instruct the reader of the poem, as well as what this instruction specifically comprises.

will also rely on established comprehensive studies of Coleridgean philosophy, metaphysics and theology, such as Owen Barfield's *What Coleridge Thought* (1971).

In sum, I shall identify the specific instruction evident in each poem by utilising a historicist and biographical approach very much reliant on Coleridge's thoughts on various subjects and his wide reading. Using the same method I hope also to investigate the specific and unique ways in which Coleridge utilises the Gothic, so as to come to an understanding of the specific characteristics of his Gothic method. He appropriates the genre in an original manner in which aspects of this often hackneyed genre are enlivened to such a point where Coleridge instructs the readers and producers thereof, and therefore, one may conjecture, also the genre itself. I shall argue that the inferior aspects of the Gothic that Coleridge derides as unimaginative, base and vulgar in his reviews and other prose writings, are proactively "corrected" in these poems so as to illustrate that, when practised correctly, it need not be the corruptive literary force many deemed it to be. An approach such as the one here proposed shall therefore not only illumine the instruction evident in these poems, and the unique way in which Coleridge appropriates the genre, but help us come to an understanding of why Coleridge would inscribe such lofty instruction into poems belonging to a seemingly abject genre. Subsequently, we may come to a better understanding of Coleridge's approach to and sentiments on the Gothic.

Coleridge's thoughts and instructive processes are, however, only one side of the coin. To hope to come to an understanding of Coleridge's utilisation of the Gothic as a means to instruction, an understanding of the Gothic, its particular characteristics and its development are therefore imperative. Consequently, Chapter One presents a concise overview of the Gothic, its development and its characteristics, so as to familiarise the reader with (or merely refresh the reader's memory about) aspects of it, such as its ability to convey instruction, its place in the British literary canon, the various manners in which it was practised, its generic typifiers, as well as its textual history, and the like. Chapter One therefore has the purpose of acquainting the reader with aspects of the genre which are important to the interpretive project undertaken in Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter Two identifies a uniquely Coleridgean theological and metaphysical form of instruction evident in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". This chapter shall also focus on Coleridge's appropriation of the Gothic in the poem, which sees him adhering to and transcending its various generic characteristics. In this chapter I aim to illustrate that in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", Coleridge communicates a "philosopheme"<sup>2</sup> which reconciles two historically dominant and

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<sup>2</sup> This is an oblique principle of reasoning, involving a "proto-philosophical meaning that could [not] have been expressed otherwise" (Halimi: 2012:397). Though I aim to show that Coleridge did in fact express the philosopheme evident in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in later prose works such as *Table Talk* and *Aids to Reflection*.

divergent schools of thought, pertaining to the theological principle in the poem. One of these schools of thought, represented by scholars such as Warren, Beer, and Gose, sees the poem as a classic Christian tale of fall, penance and redemption, the other, represented by scholars such as Bostetter, argues against such an interpretation because the chaotic and nightmarish world of the poem, so they hold, is irreconcilable with a Christian reading thereof. In Chapter Two, I propose that the Mariner and the crew effectuate their fall, not through the shooting of the Albatross, but through apostasy, in the Coleridgean sense: that is, they rely on and are guided by the Understanding and not by Reason, a process which I argue (using a Coleridgean premise) leads to apostasy and superstitious idolatry. Because the philosopheme, and by implication the instruction I hold to be evident in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", is of such a complex nature, the larger part of the chapter is dedicated to its identification. By investigating the Gothic elements evident in the poem, I hope to show that the Gothic afforded Coleridge a textual "space" which, because of its aspects as discussed in Chapter One, does not only offer Coleridge a relatively safe creative standpoint from which to convey controversial and potentially litigious ideas, but also a rich literary well from which to draw in the creation of his characters, events and settings.

Chapter Three undertakes an interpretation of "Christabel" as an instructive Gothic allegory. Here I propose that Coleridge translates various role players of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century British literary sphere, such as writers of Gothic romance, Gothic romance itself, readers and reviewers into characters who consequently dramatize the problematic nature of the then current British literary sphere's earliest and often guilty acquaintance with the Gothic. Drawing from Coleridge's reviews as well as other of his prose works about literature, as well as characteristics of the Gothic, its common characters, readers and reviewers, I aim to show how Coleridge undertakes with this Gothic allegory a twofold instructive process: he not only instructs the various stakeholders of the contemporary literary sphere by having the poem's characters and events act as a mirror (specifically with regard to this sphere's relation to the Gothic), but he also instructs the Gothic itself as a genre (it's readers and producers) by, as Richard Berkeley trenchantly states, writing a poem which "massively out-gothics the Gothic" (2014:261). The processes by which I propose Coleridge does so will be identified by viewing "Christabel" in the light of Coleridge's contestations against the Gothic, as well as against other canonical works of Gothic romance such as the works of Anne Radcliffe. Whereas Chapter Two offers a rather original close reading of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", informed by Coleridgean theology, philosophy and metaphysics, so as to draw conclusions regarding a specific instructional value embedded in the poem, Chapter Three places "Christabel" not only alongside Coleridge's views on the Gothic and contemporary Gothic literature, but also draws from more contemporary close reading of the "Christabel" as a Gothic poem. In so doing, I hope to illustrate the unique way in which Coleridge practices the Gothic in "Christabel", where, I contend, the manner in which he does so is itself instructive, in that he practically and poetically addresses its perceived inanities,

whereas the instruction evident in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is also in the metaphysical message conveyed through its narrative. In short, by identifying the type of instruction which Coleridge hopes to communicate in two of his most famous poems, and arguably his most famous productions in the Gothic mode, I seek to indicate how he appropriates a genre which at the time was the cause of great anxieties among his contemporaries. I aim to show that Coleridge saw in the Gothic a mode especially conducive as a means of instruction. He realised the power and popularity of the genre and therefore apprehended that if its corruptive inanities (both morally and from a literary point of view) were to be corrected intra-generically (as opposed to the extra-generic attacks launched against it in reviews), he needed to practise it in such a way as to “reform” it of its miasmal air, centred in its shoddy writing and cheaply exploitative tendencies.

By investigating these poems in the manner described above, I aim to illustrate that Coleridge, unlike many of his contemporaries, including Wordsworth, did not simply attack the Gothic in reviews or merely offer a “higher” aesthetic alternative. His immense knowledge of the genre and the forces which influenced it, and of those which it in turn influenced, combined with his respect for (and love of) romance, afforded him a means of conveying instruction through mytho-poetic narratives to which the genre was so conducive. Realising the powerful forces behind the Gothic’s popularity, as well as some of its propitious elements, Coleridge aimed to give an instructive, imaginative and original Gothic alternative to the hackneyed aesthetics and vulgar morality of the popular Gothic practised by some of its inferior authors.

## Chapter One

### Contextualisation and history of British Gothic literature

Jerrold E. Hogle contends that the typical “ingredients” of a Gothic work of fiction include a quasi-medieval setting, a tug of war between aristocratic and bourgeois values, secrets hidden in the past, lovers struggling with Catholic injunctions, women trapped in male dominated realms and a picturesque heightening of the natural (2003:205-223). Although not all of these characteristics are in any way compulsory in order for a work of fiction, drama or poetry to be considered Gothic, their inclusion offers a reasonably apt guideline as to what might be considered a Gothic work of literature.

Delving into what the “Gothic” might be is akin to traversing the immense maze of secret passages, corridors and halls of an ancient castle. The problem with this labyrinthine undertaking is that unlike an actual maze, the halls, passages and corridors do not necessarily have a point at which they terminate, and consequently force one to find another way of escape. No, these passages continue indefinitely and if they are not navigated with extreme caution the researcher of the literary Gothic might very well find himself lost within them. The task becomes daunting because of the convoluted semantics behind the notion of the Gothic. It is therefore imperative to circumscribe the idea of the Gothic when investigating the elements of Gothicism and how they function as modes of instruction in Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel”. Seeing as the idea of the Gothic is historically and semantically convoluted, it is clear that the proposed investigation cannot be undertaken before a requisite contextualization of Gothic literature and the importance thereof in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century Britain is made. Consequently, this chapter begins with a list of the generic qualifications of a Gothic text, as offered by Gary Kelly (1989). Thereafter, sharper generic distinctions pertaining to the Gothic, made by the likes of Hogle, Clery, Miles, Ellis and other scholars, along with archetypal elements of Gothic literature (pertaining to plot, characterisation, setting *et cetera*) and the underground histories behind these elements shall be considered. In doing so, this chapter hopes to equip the reader with knowledge of the origins of the British Gothic novel, the generic qualifiers of the Gothic, elements of eighteenth- and nineteenth century Gothic fiction, as well as the underground

histories<sup>3</sup> and anxieties which are masked by these elements, whilst revealing the often acrid relationship between proponents of the Romantic and the Gothic.

Gary Kelly indicates that although sharp generic distinctions were not part of Romantic literary culture, transgressing the bounds of form was in fact a recurrent type of rhetorical gesture during the Romantic period (1989:42). Kelly also demonstrates that the most common form of fiction in the late eighteenth century (at least in Britain) was the sentimental tale and the novels of manners, sentiment, and emulation, which were also very often fictions of social criticism specifically alluding to “the fashion system, pride of rank, the gentry culture of conspicuous consumption, patronage and dependence, [...] and the emulation of ‘merely’ social and economic institutions by other classes” (ibid., 42-43). Consequently, sentimental tales and novels of manners display a deep-seated suspicion of the social sphere, which is principally figured in plots “featuring a young heroine harassed [...] by upper-class men or vulgar relations, as she tries to learn and to negotiate the various languages of social being and identity, and the social conflicts they embody, without losing her social identity (respectability) or – more important – her sexual and subjective integrity, her wholeness” (ibid., 43). The sense that society constitutes a conspiracy to disrupt this integrity is often present in these fictions, where the protagonist is frequently oppressed or imprisoned. From this, it is evident that the sentimental tale and the novel of manners might exhibit strong political overtones and that they were consequently very often employed by the English Jacobins (as well as the Anti-Jacobins) to illustrate the means through which false social institutions oppress the individual. Kelly points out that the perception of such oppression is indicative of the sentimental or Romantic culture’s paranoia, seeing as its proponents “saw only subjective selfhood as authentic and natural and all social categories as irredeemably relative and conflicted” (ibid., 43). Kelly further states that this type of culture led to a cult of individualism, inherent in late eighteenth century capitalist and bourgeois ideology, coordinated with various ideas of the transcendental; specifically, transcendental ideas about nature, but also history and God (ibid.). Because of its prominence in Romantic fiction as well as its tendency to inevitably lead to a transgression of limits like social conventions, laws, and codes, passion, a notion directly related to authentic selfhood, is identified by Kelly as one of the most important transcendental ideas

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<sup>3</sup> In his analysis of the Gothic in Keats’s “The Eve of St. Agnes” and how it functions to expose late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century anxieties, Jerrold E. Hogle loosely defines “underground histories” as “both the overt conceptions of history for those authors [the term, ‘those authors’ here referring to authors of Romantic poetry at large] and the covert residue of some historical conflicts and quandaries that underlie those works, even when they appear to claim otherwise” (2003:205). As stated above, Hogle uses this term, in the publication quoted above and in others, quite loosely. A consequent perusal of Hogle’s oeuvre sees the term also referring to then current anxieties pertaining to gender roles, fear or expectation of revolution in Britain, class quandaries, literary propriety, economic debates, state brutality such as the Peterloo massacre, questions as to theological and philosophical principles, and the like.

(ibid.). The collision between the self and society could also be read as an allegory for greater political collisions.

Generic boundaries start to wane when one considers that, if the fictions of sentiment and manners are set in distant times and/or foreign climes, they are referred to as “Gothic Romances”, in which one often finds virtue in distress (ibid.). This notion is usually embodied in works where a young heroine is “threatened with rape or enforced marriage, and faced with various kinds of confinement and adventures of flight and pursuit, or [...] the hero [is] deprived of social standing or his true identity, confined, as it were, in a false social self, or in a prison of one kind or the other, such as a dungeon of a tyrant or the cells of the Inquisition” (ibid.). Discerning whether these works are Gothic works of fiction or works of sentiment and manners becomes difficult, seeing as novels such as Anne Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and Matthew Lewis’ *The Monk* (1796) certainly possess aspects of both Gothic and sentimental fiction. Kelly differentiates between these two genres by indicating that critics of the Romantic era earmarked the novel of manners as specialising in “real life” (albeit limited to middling to high society), the contemporary, the familiar and to a certain extent the domestic, whereas the Gothic Romance dealt with “the exotic, the extravagant, the sublime, and the ‘not English’ or ‘not British’” (ibid., 43, 48).

Although Kelly’s differentiation of the Gothic novel, the sentimental tale and the novel of manners is not clear-cut, and his locating the origin of the British Gothic novel within the traditions of the tales of sentiment and the novel of manners is questionable (as I will illustrate below), he does indicate some key aspects of the Gothic and the reasons for its proliferation during the 1790s, as discussed by Miles (2006:43).

Firstly, Kelly illustrates (if haphazardly) that generic boundaries are at best, now as in the Romantic period, quite ill-defined and that both the Gothic novel and the tales of sentiment and the novel of manners often had clear political overtones. Again, he virtually equates the Gothic novel with the tales of sentiment and the novel of manners by stating that if the latter were set in the distant past or in an exotic locale they would be considered as Gothic. With this statement Kelly runs the risk of making a hazardous, if not false, generalisation; it does, however, suggest two valuable insights. The first is that the Gothic, because of its generic ambiguity, offered a fertile realm in which writers (often very controversial writers like Godwin and Wollstonecraft) could offer social, political, theological and literary criticism and commentary by transcending generic boundaries and in doing so make rhetorical gestures with the Gothic as a convenient vehicle. Also, as Kelly points out, the Gothic novel allowed for more outright political and social scrutiny with a lesser chance of retribution than similar critiques made in a sentimental work, seeing as the events in a typically Gothic novel take place either in the distant past or in an exotic, un-English setting (1989:49). Finally, one could agree with Kelly’s statement that, “the Gothic romance was not a coherent and authentic genre”, but rather, “an ensemble of themes and formal

elements which could be taken over and adapted in whole or part" (ibid.). This, along with other factors to be discussed shortly, is what made the Gothic a popular mode in which to write during the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries.

Clery sees the genesis of the Gothic, or at least the attachment of the term to literature of terror and horror, as a recent development. Before the second edition of Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1765), Walpole and his contemporaries would arguably have deemed the Gothic-age as a long period of time stretching from the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century AD to the Renaissance, which is claimed to have brought about the resurrection of classical learning. A period that, for them, was characterized by barbarism, superstition, and anarchy and which, in a British context, was said to have extended to the Reformation in the sixteenth century, only expiring as the result of a final disaffiliation from a Catholic past (Clery, 2006: 21). In the second edition of *Otranto* Walpole added to his title "a Gothic Story". He also broke his anonymity in the second edition and included a second preface in which he admits that he is the author of the romance and that the preface as it appeared in the first edition (relating that the story is translated from the writing of an Italian monk and that the series of events as described by the book probably took place between the eleventh- and thirteenth centuries in Italy) is false. Research in literature written in the terror and/or horror modes has routinely, at least from the 1920s, identified Walpole as the progenitor of the genre, in consequence of which Clery deduces that Walpole's subtitle, "A Gothic Story", began to gain academic weight (ibid., 22). Clery goes on to elucidate that, although research has been done on the history and the etymology of the word "Gothic", it is essentially a red herring when determining what is innovative or distinctive about eighteenth century fiction in the terror and/or horror modes. Aside from the consequences of the convoluted semantics raised by the term "Gothic", Clery does make a valuable point concerning the generic boundaries transgressed by the Gothic.

Clery, like Kelly, indicates the difference between a novel and a romance. The first is "realist", as in the works of Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson, and it propagates the notion that fiction can only be a vehicle of useful instruction or moral improvement if it is true to life. The latter however, is imbued with the incredible, hyperboles, coincidences, idealism and deviation from instances that can be deemed as true to life. Accordingly, romance was very often accused of being a Roman Catholic type of imaginative imposition, while the novel stayed closer to Protestantism by not swaying too far from a true or real representation of reality as it is. But Clery indicates that in order for the novel to convey both the *utile* as well as the *dulce* it needed romance, not only as the conveyer of *dulce*, but also as a benchmark by which to measure its own achievements pertaining to its realist yet intriguing representation of life in hope of instruction and entertainment (2006:23). Consequently, a dialectical relation between the novel and the romance was established, blurring the line separating them. Towards the beginning of the 1790s the novel was

seen as a form with no strict rules, but during the neo-classical times of the early eighteenth century it was earmarked by its formal realism, which continued into the later eighteenth- and early nineteenth century; but by this time the novel had been somewhat weaned from its allegiance to a strictly realistic plot through a process which saw its authors navigating the realistic mode of the representation of events so as to include fantastic and supernatural events narrated in such a way as to appear real (Ellis, 2000:17-19). This notion is evident in Anne Radcliffe's habit of revealing seemingly supernatural events to be, after all, quite natural. This device is seen by Ellis as one employed "in order to reconcile Protestant incredulity and taste for ghostly terror" (ibid., 26-27). It can also be argued that with the first publication of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), Walpole aimed at benefiting from the same device by the inclusion of the notorious first preface. Yet, as Clery mentions, the supernatural is categorically an "unnovelistic" aspect of the Gothic as it cannot be "reconciled with the empirical observation of the novel" (2006:24). Thus he finds *The Castle of Otranto* to be structurally unstable due to the ambivalence displayed by Walpole as to which course to follow, the pastiche of the medieval narrative (romance) or the mode of formal realism. Walpole allows the former to undercut the latter causing an imbalance between the two.

If one considers that Walpole walked the generic tightrope between the novel and the romance as early as 1764 one realises his significance in the genesis and formation of British Gothic literature. Walpole arguably lacked the freedom associated with the novel in the 1790s when he combined the supernatural occurrences associated with romance and the naturalistic characterisation and dialogue of the novel (Clery, 2006:24). But, in a way that is akin to the manner in which the novel drew from romance, so Walpole drew from the innovations of realism as well as from the sentimental tale and the novel of manners. In doing so Walpole, according to Ellis (2000:20), effected a reconciliation of the novel and certain romance conventions. In the second preface of *The Castle of Otranto* Walpole explains that his "Gothic Story" "was an attempt to blend two kinds of romance, [...] the antient [*sic*] and the modern" (in Ellis, 2000:20). According to Ellis this maverick theoretical *rapprochement* of the two modes of fiction not only dilates the definition of the novel, but also enlivens and energises it as a genre (2000:21). It is the Gothic's approach to the supernatural observed as a formal realism which, according to Ellis, is one way in which it hopes to excite passions of fear and terror. This radical move made by Walpole was however, as most things new and unfamiliar, not necessarily welcomed, as is evident from eighteenth century reviews. The predominantly negative critique associated with the Gothic is further proof of Walpole's contemporaries' struggle to come to terms with the appearance of this generic conundrum.

As I have shown, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* is seen as the ground zero for the British Gothic novel. Considering that he essentially duped the reading public into believing that the first edition was a translation and therefore authentic, only later to reveal that he was the author and that the

work was indeed fictional, brings us to another problem raised by the Gothic. As mentioned earlier, the archaic or exotic, un-English settings of the archetypal Gothic novel allowed the author more freedom in commenting on British politics and society without fear of retribution. But emptying ancient characters and symbols of their original meaning and representing them as authentic, brings us to a problem that has plagued the Gothic since the publication of Walpole's second edition of *Otranto*. This problem (quite frankly the source of a deep anxiety among Walpole's contemporaries) is the notion of simulacra. Some critics became aware of and anxious about the fact that representations of ancient or medieval times, like Walpole's residence, Strawberry Hill, and (after the publication of the second edition) *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), might be poor imitations devoid of meaning other than their drive to imitate. In order to understand the eighteenth- and nineteenth century anxieties pertaining to simulacra, one has to understand the value of certain non-literary aspects of the Gothic during the eighteenth- and nineteenth centuries in Britain.

As mentioned earlier, the term "Gothic" would have brought images of barbarism and the fall of the ancient Roman Empire to mind for Walpole's contemporaries. The preceding Augustan literary period, with its neo-classical values, deemed the Roman Empire to be the greatest expression of civilisation the world had ever known, and anything Gothic (in other words, barbarically non-classical) was seen in a negative way. Consequently, Rome was something to aspire towards while Gothicism was to be detested as a contrapuntal barbarism deriding the very notion of civilisation. However, Ellis indicates that by the mid-eighteenth century, with the dawn of the so-called Age of Sensibility, the term "Gothic" came to lose many of its negative connotations. During this time there was a revisionary reappraisal of what Gothic culture meant; the past was considered to be superior to the present – a nostalgic notion, to say the least.

This process of revision had its roots in the English Civil War, where local republicans associated their ideology with Greece, Rome and contemporary republican states such as Venice. Consequently, writers such as James Harrington repudiated the monarchist past as "Gothick", meaning barbaric and ruined (Ellis, 2000:25). Ellis shows that after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 (and again in 1688) political theorists sought counter-arguments against republican neo-classicism. It is no surprise that they turned to Britain's "Gothic" past and re-appraised it to identify valuable aspects of the British constitution, such as its common law tradition and specifically the restriction of the rights of the crown. Philosophers such as David Hume, Adam Smith and Edmund Burke debated the issue, "arguing that the English constitution was the product of progressive evolution. It preserved elements of the simple barbarous gothic system of government, while at the same time revising and refining the laws for a modern and politer era, resulting in a 'mixed' or 'balanced' constitution that was presented as the envy of the world" (ibid., 25-26). In these arguments the Gothic was valuable because it indicated the

“historically remote origins of the constitution” (ibid., 26), lending authority through history. Furthermore, Ellis indicates the importance of two eighteenth century works of literary history preceding the publication of Walpole’s *Otranto*, namely Thomas Warton’s *The Faerie Queene of Spenser* (1762) and Richards Hurd’s *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) (ibid., 25).

Both Hurd and Warton stressed that medieval romances should be regarded as a product of their times and both took an interest in the customs of chivalry as the foundation for romance (ibid., 26). Importantly, both Hurd and Warton interpreted supernatural elements in romance as allegories of social realities and therefore argued that, when viewed in context, medieval romance was a legitimate form of artistic expression. According to Ellis, Hurd and Warton informed Walpole’s treatment of the relation between the supernatural and medieval settings (ibid.). Hurd speculated that supernatural creatures like giants were imaginatively transposed symbols for oppressive feudal lords, the castles of whom were impenetrable seats of power. This exaggerated fantasy is seen by Ellis as a natural offshoot of violently appropriated power (ibid.).

It is therefore evident that the writings of Hurd and Warton introduce an important notion to the eighteenth century literary sphere: that the relative primitivism of Gothic society allowed for a literary realm more conducive to the free play of the imagination, which consequently did not place the same stringent constraints on poetic inspiration as the Augustan literary period. In other words, as Ellis states, Hurd and Warton questioned the certainty that civilization meant progress by alluding to the fact that what eighteenth century British society, and indeed the modern era, gained in manners it lost in poetic inspiration (ibid., 27). Once this sense of loss was acknowledged, no great leap had to be made to come to the conclusion that “modern society must learn from the uncivilized past and aspire to imitate it” (ibid., 28).

Returning to the literary Gothic, critics became filled with anxiety about these politically charged imitations of the past, and therefore also about writers like Walpole and Lewis, whom some accused of merely imitating that which had already been imitated, and therefore counterfeiting the counterfeit. What is meant by the notion of counterfeiting counterfeits is that the above-mentioned authors imitated the romances of medieval times, which included, importantly, elements of the supernatural. In eighteenth century Protestant England, these supernatural elements were themselves deemed to be false imitations of reality, designed and coordinated by the wielders of Catholic superstitions. From Ellis’s research on the writings of Hurd and Warton, it is evident that these supernatural elements in medieval romances were indeed imitations of reality because of their allegoric and symbolic value. The signifier in this case had therefore been separated from that which it originally signified. Authors who consequently drew from medieval romances and appropriated such materials into their own writing were, according to Hogle, imitating counterfeits of counterfeits of reality and were consequently producing twice-removed simulacra. Considering Walpole’s contemporaries’ fears about simulacra, a viable fear during the

dawn of the Industrial Revolution, which saw the mass production and reproduction of things previously regarded as artisanal, it is entirely understandable that appropriated Gothic images (themselves having the authority which we tend to assign to the past) added to this fear by embedding contemporary anxieties in a fictionalised but historically-informed distant past, and by doing so made the past speak for and about the present.

It is, however, important to note that this was not the only reason for Walpole's writing *The Castle of Otranto*. Clery shows that Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) represented imaginative transport, both mentally and physiologically, as a necessity (2006:19). Burke begins by outlining the problem of the indifference of the reading public as a state of mental impassivity brought about by a steady diet of the familiar. An antidote to this mental state is not only to be found in the beautiful but also in the sublime. For Burke the sublime entailed a peculiar kind of pain mixed with delight and an apprehension of danger in nature or art without the immediate fear of destruction (Clery, 2006:28). So the body remains safe while the imagination is shaken and riveted by images and ideas of the terrible sublime. This imaginative state is also what Walpole aimed to produce in his readers: to allow the imagination, both his own and his readers', to be transposed by the ruling principle of the sublime, and to also allow for the satiated literary sphere to be reinvigorated by some much needed novelty. Or as Faflak puts it, the theories of both Burke and Kant "suggest that something in us asks for the contrived reproduction of conditions to induce a real response of fear in order to jolt us out of the complacency produced by the equally contrived nature of everyday life" (2016:95-96). Most notably, Faflak inadvertently juxtaposes the supernatural to the mundane, the romance to the novel, thereby illustrating that although the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century men of letters and literary critics would see the former as more contrived than the latter, it may have been the very fabricated nature of an increasingly commercialised and industrialised society which initiated the need for contrived productions of the Gothic. Here it is also important to remember that just as the Gothic allowed for the rather uninhibited projection of social and political commentary and critique and its ability to "address unseen, unknown and unacknowledged aspects of human existence", it also served as an accessible realm in which to experience the Burkean sublime rather undemandingly (ibid., 96). Furthermore, the Gothic must be viewed in the light of an economic context too. The burgeoning thereof from the 1790s up until the 1820s suggests that writing a successful Gothic novel promised great economic reward for the author (Ellis, 2002:43); it is therefore easy to imagine the aversion critics had towards it, especially during a time which saw the rise of the middle class. Keeping this in mind, the present chapter can inch closer to a greater understanding of why the Gothic was such a fertile and successful genre in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century British literary sphere, as well as why it was so easily condemned by most critics during its effulgence.

Firstly, it has been determined that the Gothic's loose generic qualifiers, as well as the safety which its un-Englishness assured, allowed for it to become a relatively secure place for authors to comment on eighteenth- and nineteenth century society in a recognisable and easily accessible manner. However, contrapuntally, its prominence in mid-eighteenth century political debates told of its essential Englishness. Thus the Gothic offered a unique literary platform for those who wished to comment covertly on sensitive British matters, because it was historically, ideologically and literarily both close to and far from home. Not only this, but seeing as Gothic literature was also very popular, especially with the low and middle classes (and also women of the upper-class), it became, too, a very convenient vehicle with which to project political and social ideas that would reach and hopefully influence the masses.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, most of the social and political commentary and anxieties displayed in the Gothic have to do with anxiety about class (especially the rising bourgeoisie), gender conflicts, theology, the role of and interplay between the individual in society, Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin ideals, fears of revolution, and the like. This made some critics nervous, and seeing as periodicals of the time, like *Blackwood's*, the *Edinburgh*, the *Anti-Jacobin* and the *Quarterly*, were often politically affiliated, reviews (both favourable and unfavourable) regularly hinged on a political balance. Thirdly, the Gothic invigorated some critics by relying on the representation of simulacra, which added to the anxiety surrounding this notion prevalent at the time. From the above it is however evident that, and this brings me to my fourth point, the representation of counterfeited counterfeits was often practised not only because of the relative safety it offered the author, but also because it allowed for the rather facile presentation of the sublime. The relative ease of achieving this presentation might have especially offended some critics, because the presentation of the truly beautiful and sublime should not be easy: its difficulty makes its successful representation significant. By allowing simulacra to become the vehicles for such facile representations of the sublime, critics would have seen themselves as collaborators who justified the very existence of what they feared and detested. Here it is also important to note that the violence and sexual nature of the Gothic as a genre also offended some critics, even though some authors maintained that they were being true to the period in which the events in their work transpired. Whether this tendency was a result of the desensitisation to violence brought about by the French Revolution or of the public's inherent need for terror, horror and novelty, or a bricolage thereof, is open to speculation, but the fact that Gothic literature was generally condemned by critics while its scandalous nature (specifically its lasciviousness) contributed to its popularity remains an important consideration. In this chapter it has also been shown that the Gothic novel was a means for personal economic advancement and duly ran the risk of being branded a cash cow with little or no literary significance (Ellis, 2002:43).

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<sup>4</sup> An idea most evident in William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794) and the productions of other radical, and often Jacobin, authors.

It therefore comes as no surprise that since the publication of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800, the Gothic and the Romantic seemed to be juxtaposed. Gamer (2000) argues that not only did early Romanticism and the Gothic seem juxtaposed, but that the development of canonical late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century Romanticism relied considerably on the renunciation of texts belonging to the genre to which we today refer to as the Gothic. Gamer's evidence is drawn from the often public denigration of such texts, and the offering of literary aesthetic alternatives to a genre interchangeably branded as "detritus", the product of a "terrorist school of writing", "modern novels", and "horrid novels" by prominent Romantic literati (Townshend & Wright, 2016:5). Townshend and Wright indicate that Wordsworth's defamation of "those frantic novels', 'sickly and stupid German tragedies' and 'deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse'" in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1800 was no exception, and that these attacks, absent in the short advertisement of the 1798 publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, were most probably occasioned by the relatively belligerent reviews received by the first edition (ibid.). Drawing on Gamer, Townshend and Wright would also see this process as anti-Gothic cleansing, where Wordsworth renames, revises, glosses and excludes certain works (most notably Coleridge's supernatural poems such as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel") from the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (ibid., 6). Drawing further from Gamer's research as well as from the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Townshend and Wright argue that "Wordsworth and Coleridge seemingly intended [...] the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* [...] as an antidote to, or counteraction of, the 'degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation' that was the Gothic" and that Romanticism consequently "presented itself as the Gothic's favourable aesthetic alternative" (ibid.).

Despite Coleridge's being notably more drawn to the Gothic than Wordsworth, Townshend and Wright show that Coleridge also launched major attacks against the genre, stating most notably that it was too conventional and akin to the soulless, unimaginative machine-driven productions of the then current early years of the Industrial Revolution, that it may have adverse effects on its readers (especially its young and/or female readers) through its lewdness and ability to incite dangerous passions in young women, and that its excessive violence and scenes of horror (potentially conducive to voyeurism) indicated a decline in national literary taste (ibid., 8-11). Despite this apparent rift between Romanticism and the Gothic, Townshend and Wright go on to argue, as does Kelly, that "'Romanticism' as both critical term and category of literary-historical description was beset by similar vagaries" as those which beset the Gothic, that Romanticism is a "retrospective 'invention' of literary historians who variously sought to comment on, respond to, analyse and historicise a rather disparate group of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century poets and writers", and that individuals affiliated with Romanticism, like Coleridge, Southey and Wordsworth, despite their contestations against the Gothic and their calls for and claims to originality, frequently borrowed from the very genre they denigrated; that their works and ideology

are often “replete with borrowed elements” (ibid.,16). From this it would appear that the supposed rift between two ostensibly well-defined and thoroughly different genres seems to be a more covert, more complex rift between two genres or literary movements whose boundaries, during the time which saw them as current literary movements, were much less clearly defined and more osmotic than is generally held.

To summarize, British Gothic literature commented on its age, and raised social, political, theological and literary anxieties during the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century; it often elicited vehement responses from members of what we now know as the Romantic school. When a progenitor of British Romanticism such as Coleridge appropriated various Gothic elements for his poetic works, an appropriation which elicited harsh criticism from some of his contemporaries, the fact cannot be ignored. Chapter Two will identify Coleridge’s pedagogical project in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, and investigate how and why the Gothic plays such a fundamental role therein.

## Chapter Two

### Coleridgean Metaphysical and Theological Instruction in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

Coleridge wrote “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, Part 1 of “Christabel”, “Kubla Khan”, “Frost at Midnight” and “This Lime-tree Bower My Prison” in 1797 after he had settled in a cottage on Lime Street in Nether Stowey in a period which will later become generally accepted as his *annus mirabilis*. He had gained a bit of fame, and infamy, during his Bristol lectures two years prior and had now settled down with Sara Coleridge (née Fricker) and their infant son, Hartley. Seventeen years later in the *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge would recall:

I retired to Somersetshire at the foot of the Quantock, and devoted my thoughts and studies to the foundations of religion and morals. Here I found myself all afloat. Doubts rushed in; broke upon me “from fountains great and deep,” and “fell from the windows of heaven”. The frontal truths of nature religion and the books of Revelation alike contributed to the flood, and it was long ere my ark touched on Ararat and rested.

(Coleridge, 2004:48-49)

From the biblical/maritime metaphor in this excerpt, it is discernible that for Coleridge this time was marked by spiritual and philosophical doubts and growth, and the beginnings of his own metaphysics which would later be expounded in prose works such as the *Biographia Literaria* and *Aids to Reflection*. As noted by Richard Holmes (2005), Coleridge had an affinity, as is the case in the above quotation, for maritime metaphors and imagery when musing on his psyche and problems that would come to face him. Many have drawn on Coleridge’s inclination to externalise his problems in maritime metaphors and symbols and have consequently created a school of critical thought which sees “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” as a symbolic expression of anything from Coleridge’s opium addiction, to the beginnings of the unhappy marriage which was to become his and Sara’s.

Indeed, few poems have drawn more critical attention than “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”; it remains one of the most studied pieces of English literature and will most probably remain so for many years to come. Whether it is seen by critics such as Warren (1958) as a Christian tale of fall, penance and redemption along with its much debated moral, or as a symbolic expression of Coleridge’s psychological and personal problems and experiences, an absolute solution to the mystery of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” has not, and as far as one can infer, may never be reached. Consequently, the poem and the multifarious (may I say often idiosyncratic)

interpretations it has given rise to, continues to haunt studies in English Romanticism and the English canon as a whole. Some of these interpretations and analyses certainly lead to a better understanding of the poem, yet there remain a great many aspects of which the surface have barely been scratched.

One of these aspects which has recently been the subject of much debate is the poem's Gothic nature. The present chapter therefore hopes to illustrate how Coleridge purposefully appropriates Gothic elements in the "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and how these appropriations exhibit his conscious knowledge of the Gothic's uncanny ability to convey social, theological and literary commentary. In doing so the chapter aims to reconcile much of what has been said of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", in terms of symbolism, theology, historicity, literary origins and philosophy, with studies of the Gothic. It shall be argued that Coleridge was appreciative of the Gothic's ability to convey such commentary and that he utilised it extensively and knowingly in poems such as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in order to convey the theological, philosophical and metaphysical truths in which he had confidence. However, what I hope to achieve is not to convince the reader of the poem's Gothic nature, but to utilise the Gothic in this reading so that it may act both as torch and magnifying glass with which to inspect elements of the poem and thereby better our understanding of what may be called Coleridge's *magnum opus*.

Aspects of the poem which are most indubitably Gothic shall therefore be identified and discussed through historic reference to Coleridge's reading, prose writings, biography and contemporary social problems, thereby exposing the anxieties conveyed and commentary made by overtly Gothic instances in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Along with such an analysis of the poem, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century anxieties surrounding the Gothic, specifically Coleridge's contestations against the genre, will also be kept in mind. In this approach I hope to illustrate that "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is not simply and exclusively an exercise of the imagination, as Coleridge claimed in his now famous letter to Mrs. Barbault, but that the poem illustrates the beginnings of his later metaphysical thoughts and theories evident in prose writings such as the *Biographia Literaria*, *Aids to Reflection*, *The Friend*, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* and *Table Talk*. The proposed interpretation shall therefore illustrate Coleridge's purposeful adoption of the Gothic genre in the divulgence of his ideas on theology, society, literature, philosophy and symbolism. Such an analysis would offer key insights into the Gothic-Romantic relationship in the works and mind of Coleridge whilst coaxing forth a better understanding of Coleridge and his poetics as whole.

Though many critics have investigated various Gothic elements in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", such as Life-in-Death, Death, the shooting of the albatross, the ghastly crew, the hermit and the Spectre Bark, many overlook an exceptionally Gothic instance with which the reader is confronted at the very beginning of the poem; namely the wedding, or rather a wedding

procession<sup>5</sup>. Anne Williams, when differentiating between the sexes in her notion of the gendered Gothic, refers to weddings as one of the prime instances along which the divide between the Male and the Female counterparts of her gendered Gothic can be drawn (1995:103). Although Williams does somewhat fleetingly refer to the wedding in her essay, “An I for an Eye: ‘Spectral Persecution’ in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*” (1993), it strikes me, again, that this is one of the most ignored Gothic instances in the poem. In her book *The Art of Darkness: A Poetics of the Gothic* (1995) Williams states that:

The female formula demands a happy ending, the conventional marriage of Western comedy. This plot is affirmative [...] of the power of the Symbolic. It celebrates (as Wordsworth would have said) a marriage of mind and nature, though from the female perspective, the successful "marriage" is a wedding to culture. The Male Gothic protagonist, however, fails and dies.

(Williams, 1995:103)

Although the reader is unaware of the circumstances of the wedding in “*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*”<sup>6</sup>, and therefore cannot judge the wedding in terms of Williams’ gendered Gothic, it suffices to say that the entire narrative of “*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*” is framed within a wedding; a sacramental union between individuals which presupposes and effects communal and societal unity and a sense of belonging, or as Williams says above, “a wedding to culture”. The wedding narrative is, however, interrupted (the first of many intra- and extra-textual interruptions in “*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*”) by the Mariner’s telling of his own narrative to the Wedding-Guest, which prevents the reader from ascertaining whether this wedding is indeed the “happy ending, the conventional marriage of Western comedy” which Williams identifies above as characteristic of the Female Gothic formula. The following passages hope to illustrate that the Mariner’s interruptive narrative is a narrative which effects a wedding, a sacramental union between the Wedding-Guest and the true nature of reality and Christian theology.

In his book *What Coleridge Thought* (1971), Owen Barfield sets himself the difficult task of attempting an understanding of Coleridge’s (often self-contradictory) metaphysics. Barfield discusses, among other topics, Coleridge’s views on the act of thinking and thoughts, the Understanding, Reason, Imagination and Fancy, man and God, life, and more.<sup>7</sup> Here one of Barfield’s principal references is Coleridge’s definition of life as found in *The Theory of Life*: “the

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<sup>5</sup> Likewise, the reader is confronted with the preternaturally interrupted wedding of Conrad and Isabella in Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*.

<sup>6</sup> Unaware in comparison to other literary Gothic weddings such as the wedding of Conrad and Isabella in Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), or the joint wedding of Emily and Blanche at the end of Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794).

<sup>7</sup> Concepts such as the Understanding, Reason, Imagination and Fancy, have been capitalised so as to differentiate these concepts as they are defined and described by Coleridge from their colloquial usage.

tendency at once to individuate and to connect, to detach, but so as either to retain or reproduce attachment” (Barfield: 1971:155). Barfield goes on to state that:

Either to “retain” or to “reproduce”: There may be a measure of detachment of a part from its whole, with retention of the original attachment; but beyond a certain point, the totality of *natura naturans*, which is life itself, must find and establish a fresh centre in the detached “part”, from which to begin, as it were, over again. The *Theory of Life* attempts to display this process as it is manifested in the forms of space. But when it is the act of *consciousness* that is in question – so the “part” that is becoming detached from its source is a separate *self-consciousness*, that is, a separate individual will (a “finite will”) – the proper name for “detachment” can only be “apostasy”. That is, in Christian terminology, the original sin.

(Barfield: 1971:155)

Barfield (1971) goes on to explain that “the alternative to *retention* of attachment is its reproduction” and that “the reproduction of attachment to the original source of life [...], is, for a created individuality, regeneration by redemption”. However, the basis for Barfield’s argument lies in Coleridge’s differentiation between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans* and his theories on how and through which faculties these concepts can be grasped.

Barfield describes this differentiation along the same lines through which Coleridge distinguishes thoughts from thinking (1971:24). Drawing from Coleridge’s prose writings, Barfield identifies “the elementary principles which consciously permeate every other sentence he [Coleridge] constructs” (1971:21). According to Barfield these “principles” are: “that thinking is an act”, “that it is normally, though [...] not always an unconscious act”, that “though we are not normally conscious of the act we *are* normally conscious of the product of the act (which we call ‘thoughts’), and it is this which constitutes our self-consciousness” (ibid.). In much the same way as thoughts, *natura naturata* is, as Coleridge states in his Shakespeare lectures, “the productive power [*natura naturans*] suspended and, as it were, quenched in the product” (in Barfield:1971:24). This productive power, or *natura naturans*, is therefore non-sensory; yet for Coleridge it was not a single power which constituted the generative power behind phenomenal reality, or *natura naturata*. Coleridge raised two questions regarding phenomenal reality. First:

[...] what are the Powers that must be assumed in order for the Thing *to be* that which it is; or what are the primary constituent *Powers* of Nature, into some modification or combination of which all other Natural *Powers* are to be resolved?

(Barfield, 1971:32)

And second:

What are the forms in which these Powers *appear* or manifest themselves to our senses – or  
What are the primary *Things* into some combination of which all other *things* are to be resolved,  
as into their first elements?

(Ibid.)

To these questions Coleridge answers, “that all the primary Powers of Nature may be reduced to Two, each of which produces two others, and a third as the union of both” (Barfield, 1971:33). From this Barfield concludes that these two powers, or forces, do not make part of phenomenal nature nor are they in any sense the “cause of what is bodily”, but they are “acts or energies that are ‘suspended and, as it were, quenched in the product’”. They are the “inside of anything to which we can apply the noun matter or the adjective material” (ibid.). Being thus quenched does however not mean for Barfield, nor Coleridge, that their existence ceases, but that they are suspended in the material *id est* phenomenal. However, as Barfield points out, one cannot imagine these forces without imagining their relation to one another, and that it is this relation which Coleridge usually refers to as “polarity”, which is according to Coleridge a law “which reigns through all Nature; the duality of ‘opposite forces’ is the *manifestation* of prior unity; and that unity is a power” (ibid., 35). This polarity is “dynamic”, a “living and generative interpenetration”, and the apprehension thereof, according to Barfield, is the basic act of the imagination because grasping such an idea supposes, as each “quality or character is present *in* the other”, that we must distinguish without dividing them (ibid.). Though this might seem as if *natura naturans* and the polar forces it implies are abstractions, that the idea has “occult qualities”, Barfield states that “*natura naturans* is supersensuous, but not supernatural” (ibid., 25). It cannot, however, be apprehended by the Understanding alone, as the Understanding can only apprehend phenomena or *natura naturata* and the chain of causality linking phenomena together (ibid., 40). Barfield asserts that:

If it [the Understanding] “goes behind them [phenomena]”, it can go only to other phenomena, hitherto unapprehended but forming part of the chain. Accordingly there must be ultimate phenomena, behind which the understanding cannot go. The understanding has played its part when it has delivered them to the imagination to contemplate (and here we find ourselves pushed ahead into the issue of the relation between understanding, imagination and “Reason”).

(Ibid.)

To follow the causal chain between phenomena to where it dissolves into the supersensuous *natura naturans*, but to then search on for further supporting phenomena, so Coleridge contends, is to “wander off into the realm of fancy” (ibid.). It would be to misrecognise “thought” for “thinking”.

The chain of causality which incorporates non-traceable “ultimate phenomena” would imply a unity within the phenomenal world. Coleridge’s definition of life thus implies an antecedent unity

and Barfield concludes that life is this very unity in operation; for the principle of existence, of things both organic and inorganic, is that they come to be and cease to be, as the Greek origins of the word “phenomena”, that is, “appearing”, suggests (ibid., 42). Again, we know that Coleridge believed existence also implies a process of individuation, spiralling outward from this antecedent unity. This is a process that for Coleridge, according to Barfield, has four distinguishable gradations:

(1) absolute dependence of the parts on the whole [metals]; (2) additional dependence of the whole on the parts [crystals]; (3) greatest number of integral parts presupposed in the whole [the whole subject-matter of Geology]; (4) parts themselves possessing character as wholes, and this involving their increased interdependence [vegetable and animal life]<sup>8</sup>.

(ibid., 51)

Yet a process of individuation moving outward from an antecedent unity would imply the polar opposite of such a process, meaning that such an outward process could never be conceived of without the opposite tendency to connect; both processes indeed form part of Coleridge’s definition of life. Again, Coleridge conceives of the “productive power” as polar, here centripetal and centrifugal, the processes of which produce life and phenomenal reality. Also, like the polar forces discussed earlier, these polar forces are quenched in their product, in which these interpenetrated opposite forces of the one power “alternate in their temporary *predominance* of the one over the other” (ibid., 55). So life and all the forms it takes are *natura naturata*, the product of opposite forces of the one power, which are quenched in the product. It is this power of which Coleridge writes the following in *The Friend*:

[...] the productive power, or *vis naturans*, which in the sensible world, or *natura naturata*, is what we mean by the word, nature, when we speak of the same as an agent, is essentially one (that is of kind) with the intelligence, which is in the human mind above nature.

(in Barfield, 1971:60-61)

From this it is evident that, for Coleridge, to comprehend reality in its totality is to comprehend the very nature of its unity in its multitude, *totus in omni parte*<sup>9</sup>, a One Life, if you will. This comprehension, of course, can only be reached through understanding the interacting polar powers, or *natura naturans*, which are quenched in all that is phenomenal. This notion will be discussed later; for now, it suffices to bear in mind that these polar, supersensuous powers and their workings are not open to the Understanding or to Fancy. As indicated earlier, for Coleridge

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<sup>8</sup> Square brackets added to indicate the examples with which Coleridge illustrates the stages of the process of individuation (Barfield, 1971:51).

<sup>9</sup> “Entire in each and all”.

the Understanding operated on a phenomenal level; it is only through the Imagination that we may elevate the human mind above Understanding to the realm of Reason.

Accordingly, one may assert, like Coleridge, that seeing as the existence of the phenomenal world presupposes an antecedent unity and that there are opposite forces which govern life's tendency to "at once individuate and to connect, to detach, but so as either to retain or reproduce attachment" (Barfield: 1971:155), that the philosopher cannot hope to comprehend phenomenal reality, and therefore himself, nor the powers which call this reality into being if he decides to divide notions thereof instead of making a distinction between such notions. The key to the difference between these two approaches lies in the fact that distinction implies a closer investigation of a part of the whole whilst not forgetting its status as such, while division implies mistaking a part for the whole and therefore ignoring its role in and its very dependence on the whole (and *vice versa*), thus ignoring *totus in omni parte*. This concept is of great importance to Coleridge, as he dedicated numerous paragraphs to it in *The Friend*, the *Biographia Literaria*, *Aids to Reflection* and other prose works. As he writes in the *Biographia Literaria*:

In order to obtain adequate notions of any truth, we must intellectually separate its distinguishable parts; and this is the technical process of philosophy. But having done so, we must then restore them in our conceptions to the unity in which they actually co-exist; and this is the result of philosophy.

(Coleridge, 2004:75)

In the above quotation Coleridge illuminates the problem associated with an intended interpretation of a complex poem such as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"; scholars tend to divide aspects of the poem, isolating these aspects and thereby divorcing them from the unity which the poem presupposes in order to illustrate their interpretation of these aspects. However, we cannot, or so Coleridge says in *Aids to Reflection*, mistake a part for the whole, for:

It is a dull and obtuse mind, that must divide in order to distinguish; but it is still worse, that distinguishes in order to divide.

(in Barfield, 1971:19)

Having glanced over these complex instances of Coleridgean metaphysics, we can now consider their importance for "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", specifically their theological importance, and how the Mariner acts as an apostle-like character to which aspects of these ideas and their theological significance are revealed. Such a discussion would imply that the Mariner is a messenger of God, divinely inspired to seek those in need of his evangelical message. I will, as well, show how Coleridge utilised the Gothic so as to convey such theological concepts and how this is a continuation of what may be called the Gothic theological project at large. The sheer size and scope of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" implies, however, that an in-depth analysis of the

poem as a whole, in order to attempt an illustration of the above theses, cannot (at least not for the purposes of this chapter) be undertaken. I therefore hope to focus on certain aspects of the poem, specifically plot, particular symbols, characters, narration and the interplay of these aspects in illustrating the theses, remembering, however, not to divide particular aspects of the poem from the poem as whole, but to distinguish them rather as parts of a whole on which they are dependent and *vice versa*.

One of these aspects is the plot as it pertains to the Mariner's journey, as it is on this journey, or so I contend, that the Mariner became an apostle-like individual after being exposed to events linked to the complex metaphysics previously expounded. In order to understand the Mariner's status and function as such, we have to understand what led to his becoming such a character. Here it is important to recall that Coleridge and Wordsworth, prior to Coleridge's writing "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", intended to write "The Wanderings of Cain" but "admission of failure struggling with the sense of the exceeding ridiculousness of the whole scheme" led to the "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" being "written instead" (Holmes, 2005:169). Written shortly after the attempted writing of "The Wanderings of Cain", the Mariner, may we not concede, might consciously bear some attributes of a Cain-like character (Old Testament in a broader sense)? The Mariner's story is miraculous in that he, like Job (who also suffers and is isolated like Cain, excepting that Job did not commit a trespass against God as Cain did) and the narrative of Job's testimonial in the Bible, might act as a witness to a miracle by which God hopes to reveal aspects of Himself and his creation so as to better mankind and mankind's grasp of Christian theology and religion. Indeed, Coleridge contends in *Aids to Reflection* that "he alone discovers, who proves; and no man can prove this point, but the teacher who testifies by miracles that his doctrine comes from God" (Coleridge, 1884:200).

However, one cannot assert the theological project of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", as well as the importance of (Protestant) theology therein, without first addressing previous claims to its status as such as well as claims to the contrary. One might trace the origin of the debate, as previously noted, to Mrs. Barbault's contention that the poem has no moral, and Coleridge's response to this, that it is in fact too moralistic. From this would spring a wealth of opinions on whether "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" has a moral and what this moral might be. As indicated earlier, Warren (1958) is convinced that "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a classic Christian tale of fall, penance and redemption, while scholars such as Bostetter (1962) discredits this conviction on the basis that the Mariner's world is too capricious to suppose the existence of a benevolent Christian God, that the poem contradicts the belief in this God and the supposed redemption afforded to the Mariner, and that such a reading "superimposes upon the poem a rigid and consistent pattern of meaning which can only be maintained by forcing certain key episodes into conformity with the pattern of ignoring others" (Bostetter: 1962:241). Each side, if we may call

it so, interprets different events, symbols, characters and the like, in support of their argument whilst refuting the arguments made by the other.

Bostetter claims that:

Most of us find, I think, a curious satisfaction in having this cosmos so vividly reaffirmed; it allows us to indulge in our superstitious fears quite shamelessly. We enjoy having the fear of God thrown into such thoughtless, happy souls as a wedding-guest. And finally our religious tradition conditions us to accept automatically the pious commonplace by which the Mariner glosses over the terrifying implications of his experience – they are after all at the foundations of the Christian faith – the commonplaces about God's love for man, bird, and beast; the preferability of spiritual love to sexual love; the happiness to be found in penance and prayer.

(1962:253)

And that it is this notion which leads scholars like Warren (consequently also Beer, Gose, Chayes and many more) into the temptation to justify poetry on moral grounds; that these scholars simply cannot believe that the powerful symbolism with which one is confronted in the poem "is not morally meaningful beyond our fears and desires" and that as a result "he [Warren and presumably all those who would see "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in a similar fashion] is led ironically by the moral laws of what Coleridge called the reflective faculty upon a universe of pure imagination" (1962:254).

I believe that, given the almost inexhaustible interpretive potential of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", as well as Coleridge's own (often seemingly contradictory) prose writings on religion, revealed religion, redemption and morals, it would be stranger if a consensus on the religious meaning, or lack thereof, in and of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" were to be reached. This being said, I also believe that by studying this problem through a Gothic perspective, we might shed light on Coleridge's religious project in the poem. By analysing the text alongside Coleridge's prose writings as well as Gothic theory (so to speak), I hope to elucidate Coleridge's religious endeavours in the poem, and explore why he would rely so strongly on a genre which may seem to go against that self-same project. The crux of this religious endeavour, however, lies with the Mariner and how he came to receive divine revelation about faith and creation, how he became a messenger of God, and what this message entails. Not only this, but also what might have influenced Coleridge in the creation of such a character.

Holmes reveals that some of the earliest informing elements in the make-up of the Mariner may be found in Coleridge's childhood reading of *Philip Quarl, The English Hermit*, which tells of the adventures of Mr. Quarl, marooned on an island (2005:6). One of these adventures sees the shooting of a large and beautiful seabird with a home-made bow, an action which Quarl immediately regrets. As previously mentioned, prior to writing "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner",

Coleridge intended a collaborative writing of "The Wanderings of Cain" with Wordsworth. We might also recall that this chapter opened with an excerpt from the *Biographia Literaria* in which Coleridge tells of his musings upon religion and morals. We remember too that Coleridge famously stated in the *Biographia* that his "endeavours" in the *Lyrical Ballads*

should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.

What are these truths, or the semblances of these truths (the word "semblance" perhaps revealing Coleridge's caution in making absolute assertions), in the character of and events surrounding the Mariner? Like most questions pertaining to the Mariner, the answer begins with his shooting of the Albatross.

Bostetter (1962) claims that the shooting of the Albatross interpreted as a crime or sin for which the Mariner pays penance (as is thought to be the case by Warren, Beer and Gose) is one of the main reasons for which the poem as a Christian tale of fall, penance and redemption cannot be accepted. Bostetter contends that a loving Christian God will not allow one of his children to suffer such a cruel penance for such a trivial crime. Simply put, the punishment, according to Bostetter, far outweighs the crime and this cannot be the work of an all knowing, all forgiving and all loving Christian God. However, Bostetter seems to ignore instances in the Bible where God seemingly punishes those He loves; in one instance without the individual, Job, even having perpetrated a crime. Also, from a theological perspective, as human beings (as is iterated a great number of times in the Bible) we cannot question what God sees fit to unfold. From an academic perspective, the last may seem speculative, perhaps too tinged with faith. Yet, what Bostetter infers is a conclusion based on the human understanding of what is right and what is wrong and how to reward or punish accordingly and fairly. He uses the world of sense to come to an understanding of what previously could not be understood. What it comes down to is that Bostetter's claims as to the propriety of the Mariner's punishment, as well as the conclusions he draws to discredit the claims of Warren, inevitably discredit themselves because he ignores the fact that to make such claims would be to succumb to the "despotism of the eye", meaning to succumb to a literalizing tendency which Coleridge describes in the *Biographia Literaria* as a "strong sensuous influence" which makes us "restless because invisible things are not the objects of vision; and metaphysical systems, for the most part, become popular, not for their truth, but in proportion as they attribute to causes a susceptibility of being seen, if only our visual organs were sufficiently powerful" (Coleridge, 2004:27). The "thing not seen" in Bostetter's case is God's wisdom in seemingly punishing the Mariner for a crime which appears to be trivial. Accordingly, we may say that Bostetter mistakes the realm of Coleridgean Reason for that of Coleridgean Understanding, the

latter being the faculty by which we make sense of that which is sensuous while the former pertains to the supersensuous. Ironically, Bostetter concludes confidently by stating that Warren (and by implication all those who read "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as a tale of fall, penance and redemption) succumbs "ironically" to the temptation to impose moral laws on a world of pure imagination, that those who do so impose the reflective faculty upon this world of pure imagination (1962:254). Yet, as I have shown, Bostetter succumbs to this exact temptation (as do all who choose to write on the poem) but unlike Warren, Bostetter uses this reflective faculty, that is human Understanding, to try to interpret the actions of God, which can only be interpreted (according to Coleridge) by liberating the Understanding through the Imagination into the realm of Reason.

Irene Chayes (1965) believes that the shooting of the Albatross may be equated to the Fall of Man, as has been held by some, but that it is more specifically related to the Fall of what Coleridge describes in *Aids to Reflection* as the metaphysical condition of the Fall, that is "guidance of the Will not by Reason but by 'the serpentine and perverted Understanding', which is 'dependent on the senses for all its materials, with the world of sense for its appointed sphere'" (Chayes, 1965:89). According to Chayes the Mariner's sin does not lie in shooting the Albatross *per se*, but that the Albatross (as symbol of the Berkeleian "divine idea") is relegated to the sensuous world in the act of an attempted comprehension thereof, of which the shooting of the bird is symbolic (*ibid.*, 89-92). Chayes, one might say, sees the Mariner as a Faustian overreacher, an archetypal character in the Gothic genre, an archetype frequently ascribed to Williams' Male Gothic villain. I shall expand on the latter below; for now it suffices to take note of it. Like Chayes, Rudolf (2013) is of the opinion that the Mariner is being punished for a metaphysical violation, but a violation not necessarily in terms of the shooting of the Albatross, but of discovering the Pacific Ocean and of perceiving supernatural phenomena such as the Spectre Bark, Life-in-Death, and so on, and that his punishment is his inability to describe his discovery to others, thus prompting the continual retelling of his tale.

These and many other intriguing opinions have surfaced over the many years Coleridge's *magnum opus* has been studied, yet is it possible that the Albatross and the Mariner's reprehensible and seemingly gratuitous killing of the bird is a red herring, that the reader is misled, like the crew, to attach some great significance to the bird and the incident of its killing? May it not be somewhat short-sighted to believe a character like the Mariner, who throughout the poem misrecognises various events and characters, a crew, whose convictions regarding the bird will be shown to be unreliable, two voices which may or may not exist outside of the mind of the Mariner and a glosser who interprets certain incidents in the poem in a very specific and rigid manner without much evidence to prove his interpretation, are reliable authorities? As Rudolf states, the Mariner considers himself part of the crew, when he has already been ostracised by

them; he mistakes the Spectre-Bark for a ship speeding to their rescue and he also fails to comprehend that the Hermit cannot shrieve him (2013:198). Could it be that the Mariner, the crew and the writer of the gloss misunderstand the importance of the Albatross as a consequence of the human propensity to impose on events the Understanding, the reflective faculty which can only apprehend phenomena and the chain of causality linking these phenomena, which is *natura naturata*? As indicated above, Barfield states that there are ultimate phenomena behind which the Understanding cannot reach, and to attempt a comprehension of powers or forces which are supersensuous (*natura naturans*) and therefore not part of phenomenal reality (forces which govern the Mariner's punishment and redemption, if we are to believe Warren and Beer) is to "wander off into the realm of fancy" (Barfield, 1971:40). Again, this would be to mistake "thought", for "thinking". Here however, I must conjecture that the Albatross is not a meaningless symbol, but that the significance of the literal killing of the bird has been somewhat over-emphasized by the Mariner, the crew, the glosser and a great many readers, and that it is this in which the symbolical value of the bird truly lies, in its inferred significance.

If one looks at the 1798 version of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" substantial evidence for the Albatross as a Christian symbol simply does not seem as glaringly conspicuous as many scholars would have us believe. Rather than Coleridge himself imbuing the bird with Christian significance, it is more evident that it is in fact the Mariner and the crew who ascribe such significance to the bird; an act of the Understanding which, given their dire situation during the bird's appearance, may have been utilised by the men in an attempt to make sense of a world wholly new and terrifying to them. In ll. 61-64 of the 1798 version we read:

At length did cross an Albatross  
Thorough the Fog it came;  
And an it were a Christian Soul,  
We hail'd it in God's name

What is it about the Albatross which prompts its justification as "a Christian Soul"? A bird appearing on a ship does not automatically qualify as "a Christian Soul": certainly such a justification, with no prior evidence to support its verity would imply a break in logic. I contend that the reason behind such a leap in cognition lies in an ontological crisis caused in the crew by the alien and threatening environment of the South Pole. If one looks at what happens to ship and its crew prior to the appearance of the Albatross, it is noticeable that having entered the Antarctic Ocean, the ontological certainty with which the Mariner describes their departure and the first leg of their journey dissipates. This notion is evident in ll. 29-36 of the 1798 version where the description of the ship's navigation borders on the mundane. Even the enchanted Wedding-Guest can here break off from the Mariner's tale to beat his breast when he hears the bassoon

announcing the arrival of the bride. From the ontological certainty illustrated in ll. 29-36 the narrative shifts abruptly to:

Listen, Stranger! Storm and Wind,  
A Wind and Tempest strong!  
For days and weeks it play'd us freaks—  
Like Chaff we drove along.

Listen, Stranger! Mist and Snow,  
And it grew wond'rous cauld:  
And Ice mast-high came floating by  
As green as Emerald.

And thro' the drifts the snowy clifts  
Did send a dismal sheen;  
Ne shapes of men ne beasts we ken—  
The Ice was all between.

The Ice was here, the Ice was there,  
The Ice was all around:  
It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd—  
Like noises of a swound!

(ll. 45-60, 1798 version)

From the above it is evident that the crew suffers an ontological crisis, a crisis which deprives them of their agency, seeing as they are driven “like chaff”.<sup>10</sup> This ensuing ontological crisis is further deepened by the Mariner’s statement that the storm “play’d us freaks”. Given that “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is an imitation of a sixteenth century ballad together with Coleridge’s fascination with etymology,<sup>11</sup> the concession can be made that the definition of “freaks” would be that of the sixteenth century, when it meant, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary, “a sudden and causeless turn of mind”; a definition which has its origins in the middle English “friken”, meaning “to move nimbly and briskly” (2017). Accordingly, it seems evident that the crew, confronted with this alien experience and landscape were “play’d” “freaks” in that they could not come to understand nor identify with this experience. This notion of alienation is pushed further in l. 55 where the Mariner states, “Ne shapes of men ne beasts we ken”, and again in l. 60, where

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<sup>10</sup> A comparison which curiously recalls Jesus’s parable in Matthew 3:12.

<sup>11</sup> See H.J. Jackson “Coleridge, Etymology and Etymologic” (1983:75-88).

the noises of the ice are compared to those in a “swound”, a condition which deprives the sufferer of almost all agency and ontological certainty.

Given the grave ontological crisis in which the Mariner and crew find themselves, is it not understandable that the Albatross’ arrival should be seen as an act of Divine Providence? The men have so lost themselves and their notion of what can and cannot be, that a familiar creature, which reaffirms their notion of experiential reality and thus their own existence, is hailed as a “Christian Soul”. This idea is also evident in the prepositional phrase describing the manner in which the bird was first perceived: “And an it were a Christian Soul/ We hail’d it in God’s name” (ll. 63-64) in the 1798 version (which was changed to the less archaic “As if it had been a Christian Soul/ We hailed it in God’s name” in the 1817 version). The prepositional phrase therefore illustrates that the Albatross is not a Christian Soul, but that the crew identified it as such, an identification which, I contend, could not have been made had the men not declined into their state of ontological crisis. However, the crux of the matter is the question as to why the crew would (the terrible ordeal they find themselves in notwithstanding) experience ontological crisis and doubt and consequently ascribe religious significance to something as commonplace as the Albatross’ visitation (remembering that their identification of the bird’s religious significance is made prior to their feeding it and calling it, and its attendance of their prayers).

I believe that the origin of the men’s ontological crisis lies in the inability of their Understanding to make sense of a phenomenal world wholly alien and seemingly hostile towards them. Again, as indicated by Barfield, the Understanding is the faculty by which we organise and make sense of phenomenal reality. Drawing from Coleridge’s conception of the passive Understanding as propounded in *The Friend* as “the conception of the Sensuous, or the faculty by which we generalize and arrange phaenomena of perception: that faculty, the function of which contain the rules and constitute the possibility of outward Experience” (*in* Barfield, 1971:98), Barfield writes the following:

The word *rules* is important here. [...] Understanding is “the adaptive power”. Rules, unlike principles or laws, grow out of experience. They are inventions, whose mother is necessity. Understanding is “the faculty of suiting measures to circumstances” or of adapting a means to proximate ends.

(1971:98)

It therefore seems probable that the crew’s ontological crisis arises from the fact that the phenomenal or sensuous reality with which the Antarctic confronts them lies wholly out of their frame of reference, that they have no experience by which to construct rules in order for them to make sense of this reality through their passive Understanding. The arrival of the Albatross, however, affords them a glimpse into the familiar, and is therefore a welcome sign, a sign of that

for which they have rules and can therefore understand. It comes as no surprise that they would consequently identify the Albatross as a Christian Soul, thereby alleviating their ontological confusion somewhat. Their identification of the bird as a Christian Soul is a practical example of what Barfield says above; the Antarctic so confounds their ability soberly to comprehend their situation because they have no experience of the Antarctic and cannot therefore have formed rules through experience which would allow them to do so. However, through the faculty of the passive Understanding they link the bird and the ontological relief it offers to what they know, what they have experienced, and in this case it is religion, more specifically Christ's promise of redemption through Him.

However, the crew's ontological uncertainty is not wholly dissipated with the arrival of the bird. As stated above, its arrival relieves this crisis temporarily, but it does not afford the crew total relief. This is evident in the fluidity of the crew's perceptions of the Albatross. When it first appears, it is hailed as a good omen symbolic of God's protection of his children; the appreciation of the bird as such continues as the helmsman seemingly miraculously steers the ship through the Antarctic pack-ice as the bird attends the crew's prayers and is also fed by them. The consequence of the sequence of events unfolding after the Albatross' arrival is that the crew, seeing an apparent chain of causality between their improving situation and the bird's arrival, conclude that it must be because of the Albatross that they have survived thus far (this process itself illustrates the working of the Coleridgean Understanding as I have illustrated above). This perception changes, however, when the Mariner seemingly in a superfluous manner kills the bird.

In ll. 91-92 of the 1798 version of the poem, the Mariner states "For all averr'd , I had kill'd the Bird/ That made the Breeze to blow." Therefore the whole crew affirms that the Mariner had killed that which brought the breeze and by implication that which aided their possible survival of the ordeal. However, in the very next stanza after having made this accusation, seeing that the breeze has not dropped and the sun has risen, the crew praises the Mariner's act: "T'was right [...] such birds to slay/ That bring the fog and mist" (ll. 97-98 of the 1798 version). Yet, a few lines on in ll. 135-138, when the crew are stuck on the Pacific Ocean and their prospects again look dismal, they return to their original assumption that the bird was their saving grace and that the Mariner by killing it, doomed them. They accordingly, instead of the cross, hang the Albatross about his neck. What is exceedingly evident in the crew's oscillating convictions as to the status of the bird (and by implication the gravity of its murder) is that such an oscillation can only exist if the crew is attempting to make sense of what is happening to them through the Understanding, the reflective faculty dependent on rules. In attempting to apply their reflective faculty to the chain of events as well as the chain of causality linking them, the crew find themselves oscillating between convictions of the Mariner's deed as good or evil. This very oscillation brings the verity of their accusations into question.

But if the Albatross itself is indeed a representative of the moral “he prayeth well, who loveth well/ Both man and bird and beast” (ll. 612-613 of the 1817 version), then surely the killing of the bird is contrary to the moral learnt by the Mariner through his ordeal, and one could say that the act was against God, for according to the Mariner in ll. 616 and 617 (1817) “[...] the dear God who loveth us/ He made and loveth all”, which would mean that the killing of the bird is a sin against God, for such a killing implies the destruction of something which is made and loved by God. The seeming caprice with which the Mariner acts in shooting the bird almost serves to drive this very point home. This would then imply that the crew’s final verdict was correct and that they acted in accordance with the will of God. But, hoping to come to a comprehension as to the importance of the Albatross as representative of this moral (or not) as well as the possible motivation behind its killing and therefore the origin of the Mariner’s transcendental transgression, this chapter must return once more to the ontological crisis earlier propounded as the motivation behind the Albatross’ seeming religious significance.

It is here that I argue, contrary to Warren, Beer, Bostetter, Gose and a great many other scholars, that the act of shooting the Albatross is in itself not a sin against God because of the notion that God loves the bird, but that the killing of the Albatross implies and even effects a metaphysical violation against God, which sees the Mariner and the crew commit the Original Sin – apostasy in the Coleridgean sense.

As mentioned earlier, Irene Chayes believes that the shooting of the Albatross “can be understood as an attempt at perception or a substitute for perception [...] an effort to apprehend something for which the proper means of apprehension do not exist, or are not possessed by the Mariner”. Chayes argues furthermore that:

It is through this meaning that the shooting may possibly be related, as a number of critics have tried to relate it, to the Fall of Man. More precisely, it may be related to what Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection* was to describe as the metaphysical condition of the Fall: guidance of the Will not by Reason but by the "serpentine and perverted Understanding," which is "dependent on the senses for all its materials, with the world of sense for its appointed sphere".

(1965:89)

This Original Sin, as shown earlier, is perpetrated, in Coleridgean terms, according to Barfield

[...] when it is the act of *consciousness* that is in question – so the “part” that is becoming detached from its source is a separate *self-consciousness*, that is, a separate individual will (a “finite will”) – the proper name for “detachment” can only be “apostasy”. That is, in Christian terminology, the original sin.

(1971:155)

From the above one may draw a number of conclusions, the first being that the Mariner's much debated moral and the interpretation of the shooting of the Albatross as a crime against God in terms seemingly validated by the poem's moral, seems to be yet another misrecognition perpetrated by him. This would imply that he has, even after suffering punishment for his crime, not come fully to comprehend what he has sinned against and thus continually misinterprets the crime he has committed. Also, it implies that the ontological crisis brought about by the storm and the Arctic denies the Mariner and the crew of their perceived free will, which consequently sees them detached from their source (which is God, in that which is familiar to them) by the guidance of their Will (even if it has in a physical sense been denied them) not by Reason but by the sensuous Understanding which infers supersensuous powers in objects of the sense, promoting a type of apostasy which also to a certain extent brings about idolatry (in that great religious importance is attached to everyday objects). This idolatry and the processes by which it is brought about are to be seen in the religious significance and supernatural powers the Mariner and the crew ascribe to the Albatross as well as their inference as to the actuality and powers of the Polar Spirit, the existence of which in the original 1798 version (ll. 127-130<sup>12</sup>) is inferred solely from the crew's dreams and not through some concrete revelation of its presence. One may identify this idolatrous process as another attempt of their Understanding to make sense of preternatural events and thereby detach themselves further from the source.

This type of detachment, where the part detaches "from its source" to become a separate self-consciousness, "a finite will", which has been shown to have its origin in being guided by the Understanding and the world of sense, is best illustrated in ll. 152-153, where the Mariner first spots the Spectre-Bark and mistakes it for a ship which might aid them. It is here where, because the Mariner and the crew have lost their voices because of parched throats, the Mariner, in order to hail the bark, bites his arm and drinks his own blood, which enables him to alert the crew of the approaching ship. The crew follows suit, and all were soon drinking their own blood (l. 158). Although this scene has been seen as a type of communion, I believe the negative events which transpire afterwards negate this opinion. Rather the scene serves as the ultimate exhibition of apostasy: having detached themselves from God through the Understanding and its consequence of ascribing divine status to the Albatross, the crew and the Mariner apostatise further through their utter self-reliance in drinking their own blood as opposed to that of Christ in the Holy Communion, of which this instance is an inversion. This symbolic process sees the mariners

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<sup>12</sup> "And some in dreams assured were  
Of the Spirit that plagued us so:  
Nine fathom deep he had followed us  
From the Land of Mist and Snow."

Notice how from a dream the crew infer factual knowledge like the depth and sex of the spirit, another illustration of the workings of the perverted Understanding.

relying on themselves as the centre and in doing so, hailing that which to them promises salvation but instead brings only doom. This grotesque scene, to my mind, is the ultimate symbol of apostasy, which sees human beings literally relying on themselves for redemption, guided by sensuous Understanding, blind to the supersensuous and to Reason. This is a process which in this case can only promise self-destruction, yet a destruction, and the processes by which it is brought about, which Coleridge held to be the very grounds for Christianity.

In *Table Talk* Coleridge asks “what are the essential doctrines of our religion, if not sin and Original Sin, as the necessitating occasion, and the redemption of sinners by the Incarnate Word as the substance of the Christian dispensation?” (2003: 191). We know that for Coleridge, without sin and Original Sin, without the Fallen state of mankind, there would be no reason for redemption through Christ. It is in this sense that Adam and Eve, having disobeyed God elicited the need for a Christ. This would imply that we, as Fallen beings with a free, finite Will other than that of God, should embrace our status as such instead of lamenting it, because it is only through such a realisation that we can begin to apprehend the concept which Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection* calls “an evil common to us all” (1884:145) and work towards redemption premised on the awareness of Original Sin. This Original Sin (which is a moral evil originating in the Will, according to Coleridge in *Aids to Reflection* (1884:145-246)), cannot originate in the Divine Will and therefore has its origin in the Will of man and as such it is a mystery, something we know to exist but cannot explain; though we may apprehend the concept of Original Sin, we do not have the ability to communicate or comprehend it. However, an apprehension of moral evil, of all sins, originating in our finite Will, often guided by Understanding, may allow us to realise our detachment from Divine Will, the centre of creation, and in doing so we may seek to re-attach ourselves through redemption through Christ. What the above amounts to is that for Coleridge Original Sin is something that is common to all people and that the apprehension of its existence is paramount if one is to hope for redemption through Christ.

I contend that this notion is illustrated in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” through the instance which sees the Mariner blessing the water snakes. However, before this redemptive moment is discussed, a prerequisite discussion of the very specific terms in which the Mariner laments his situation when the ship sits motionless on the Pacific, as well as the terms of the description of his situation after the crew has died, is paramount.

In ll. 123-126 (of the 1798 version of the poem) the Mariner describes the luminescent water around the ship as “like witch’s oils” which “burnt green and blue and white”, a sight which, it can be inferred from the context, does not inspire an appreciation of the beauty thereof but rather its ghastliness and the horror with which it is apprehended. Green, black and purple are also colours used to describe the appearance of Death (in the 1798 version). In both instances the chromatic description serves to portray abhorrence and the horror of being exposed to the preternatural. In

ll. 121 and 122, before the arrival of the Spectre-bark, the Mariner makes the first of two references to the “slimy things” which “crawl with legs/ Upon the slimy sea”. The second reference is made after the crew had died in ll. 228-231 (1798 version); here the Mariner recounts:

The many men so beautiful,  
And they all dead did lie!  
And a million million slimy things  
Liv'd on—and so did I.

So in the second reference to “slimy things” it is evident that the Mariner identifies more with the abject “slimy things”, than with the “beautiful”, and now dead, crew. The origin of such an identification is simple, in that the Mariner, like the “slimy things”, is alive, unlike the crew, and the Mariner, like the “slimy things”, is to be abhorred because, according to himself, he is the sole cause of his crew members’ untimely demise. However, this tendency of loathing and horrific description and the terms used in the description of these abject instances changes when the Mariner witnesses the sea snakes and describes them using a remarkably similar colour scheme.

The Mariner describes the water in which the snakes swim as “charmed” water which “burnt” “a still and awful red” (1798, ll. 262-263) and in which the snakes swim in “tracks of shining white” (1798, l. 266). When the snakes rear their heads out of the water “the elfish light/ Fell off in hoary flakes” (1798, ll. 267-268). The colours of these snakes are “Blue, glossy green, and velvet black” (1798, l. 271), and this description is followed by another of the tracks they make as they swim, which in this instance seem “a flash of golden fire” (1798, l. 273). This instance, the instance which sees the Mariner blessing the water snakes and thereby having the Albatross drop from his neck and sink into the sea, is widely regarded (especially in the Warren and Beer tradition) as the instance which sees the Mariner being absolved from his curse. But what has been somewhat ignored is that the colours the Mariner uses in describing the water snakes are the same colours which he utilised, prior to his encounter with the snakes, to describe what Jerrold Hogle calls “sites of abjection” (2012; 161).<sup>13</sup>

When viewing the significance of the colours the Mariner uses in describing various sites of abjection as well as the water snakes, it is observable that he uses the same colours which previously inspired fear and horror to describe his site of redemption – that which incorporates

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<sup>13</sup> Sites of abjection, according to Hogle, pertain to characters, specific settings or aspects of a setting, events or aspects of events in Gothic literature, where what is abject to the human mind or society is compressed into the being of these characters, events or settings – usually terrific or horrific. A popular instance of such a site is the monster in *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, where Mary Shelly uses the monster as a “site” of abjection on which to project nineteenth century fears and anxieties concerning the unchecked progress of science and contemporary research into reanimation through galvanisation.

those very water snakes. When the Mariner sees Life-in-Death and Death clearly enough to describe them, Death is presented in the following manner:

His bones were black with many a crack,  
All black and bare, I ween;  
Jet-black and bare, save where with rust  
Of mouldy damp and charnel crust  
They're patch'd with purple and green.

(1798: ll. 181-185)

As for the description of Life-in-Death in ll. 186-190 (1798):

Her lips are red, her looks are free,  
Her locks are yellow as gold:  
Her skin is as white as leprosy,  
And she is far liker Death than he;  
Her flesh makes the still air cold.

Here it is important to recall that the ice-bergs in l. 52, which comprise a great part of the alienating landscape of the Antarctic, are "As green as Emerald" and, that, as mentioned earlier, when the ship lies idle on the Pacific (just prior to the crew hanging the Albatross around the Mariner's neck) the Mariner describes the water being "like witch's oils" which "burnt green and blue and white". Isolating the dominant colours used in the description of these sites of abjection, or instances which inspire fear, dread and horror, it is evident that these colours are: black, green, purple, yellow (gold), red, blue and white. These colours, recalling the description of the water snakes, are the exact colours used to describe their beauty. Why would the Mariner's perception of what is beautiful as opposed to what is horrendous be described using the same chromatics? If it is also accepted that it is commonly held that snakes are slimy, why would the Mariner suddenly come to see the slimy inhabitants of the ocean, the self-same inhabitants which he utilised in ll. 228-231 to exemplify his detestable nature, as things that are so beautiful that he cannot help but bless them?

The above discussion therefore illustrates how Coleridge thought on the importance of Original Sin in relation to the doctrine of Christianity. More importantly, he sees the Original Sin, apostasy of a finite Will, for what it is, thereby appreciating it as that which heralded our relationship with Christ. I believe it is for this reason that Coleridge chose snakes to be blessed by the Mariner. The Serpent of Genesis is one of the most well-known symbols of evil in the Western world. It is Lucifer incarnate and is therefore by implication also a representative of Lucifer's state as a Fallen angel who was the first to commit the Original Sin through his apostasy and who successfully sought to reproduce the same state in humankind. The snake is therefore a famous "site" of

abjection, upon which all that is sinful in humankind is symbolically thrust. One might go so far as to say that the “slimy things” of l. 121 “crawl with legs” whereas the sea snakes by implication have none, and that this resembles the punishment afforded to the Serpent of Genesis where God removes its legs so that it must crawl on its belly.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, by seeing the beauty in the snakes (the symbols of an apostatised finite Will) the Mariner, one may infer, is released from merely lamenting a perceived sin and consequently sees God’s grace in the Original Sin.

In *Aids to Reflection* Coleridge states that:

The first human sinner is the adequate representative of all his successors. And with no less truth may it be said, that it is the same Adam that falls in every man, and from the same reluctance to abandon the too dear and undivorceable Eve: and the same EVE tempted by the same serpentine and perverted understanding, which, framed originally to be the interpreter of the reason and the ministering angel of the Spirit, is henceforth sentenced and bound over to the service of the Animal Nature, its needs and its cravings, dependent on the senses for all its materials, with the World of Sense for its appointed sphere [...] I have shown elsewhere, that as the Instinct of the mere intelligence differs in degree not in kind, and circumstantially, not essentially, from the *\_vis vitæ\_*, or vital power in the assimilative and digestive functions of the stomach and other organs of nutrition, even so the Understanding, in itself and distinct from the Reason and Conscience, differs in degree only from the Instinct in the animal.

(1884:141)

In this excerpt Coleridge again contends that sin is in every man, for such is our Fallen state, and that it is the Understanding (originally intended to “be the interpreter of the reason and the ministering angel of the Spirit”, but now relegated to the material, sensuous world) which elucidates such a state, a state where it differs only in degree from animal instinct. It would follow that animal instinct implies a will to survive, to subsist. Having been denied these corporeal wants, the Mariner and the crew display the affinity between the Understanding and instinct in that their Understanding acts as a self-preserving faculty which ascribes rules to something wholly alien to them and which plunges them into ontological crisis. However, the Mariner, having been isolated and denied these wants, then comes to bless that which is sin incarnate. The Mariner having symbolically realised the importance of sin as premise to redemption, the Albatross, the mark of his and the crew’s apostasy, drops from his neck and sinks into the sea.

The discussion thus far has centred on the nature of the crime committed by the Mariner and the crew and on the details of his redemption. The reader at this point, quite justifiably, might notice the absence of an in-depth discussion of preternatural characters such as the Polar Spirit, Life-

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<sup>14</sup> Genesis 3:14, “And the Lord God said unto the serpent, because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life”.

in-Death, Death, the two disembodied voices who discuss the Mariner's crime and further castigate him for it, the undead crewmen, as well as the angels who stand upon their bodies near the end of the poem. Though I believe that the Mariner's status as an apostle-like character hinges largely upon his crime and his consequent redemption, most of these characters make part of what the glosser of the 1817/1834 version calls the Mariner's "horrible penance" (Damrosch *et al*, 2010:573).

One problem which has confounded many critics and which may have led some into erroneous assumptions is the actuality or not of the preternatural characters, whether they exist or whether their existence is inferred through the faulty Understanding of the Mariner and crew, as propounded above. Whether real or not, these characters, one may concede, do carry symbolic weight, both in their characteristics and appearance, and Coleridge utilised them in such a way as to comment on, critique and even expose late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century anxieties. The latter bears tremendous weight and any analysis focussing on the Gothic aspects of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" would be incomplete without an analysis of these characters as "sites of abjection" wherein Coleridge projects certain comments and critiques on contemporary society and practices. However, if one is to comprehend the workings of the Mariner and the crew's Understanding and therefore their sin and punishment (and by implication Coleridge's instructive religious project in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"), one may begin by looking into the actuality of these characters' existence in the seemingly chaotic world of the poem.

Focussing mainly, as I have, on the 1798 version of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", it is evident that not all the characters share the same actuality of existence, in the sense that some are within plain sight of the Mariner and the crew, while the existence of others is mainly inferred from circumstance as well as the dreams of the Mariner and crew. By distinguishing among the characters along these lines, both their significance as to the events as well as the theological project of the poem may be inferred. Later on it will also be shown how these characters' material actuality morphs throughout the different versions of the poem as well as how the glosser of the 1817/1834 version of the poem makes unfounded claims as to their actuality. For now, let it suffice to first distinguish which characters' actuality is revealed to the Mariner and/or the crew materially and which preternatural characters' existence is merely inferred.

Seeing as the inferred supernatural characters bear, for the purposes of the argument here propounded, more weight (that is in terms of the role of the faulty human Understanding and its relation to apostasy), they will be discussed first; thereafter the significance of the materially actual supernatural characters will be discussed. As I have noted earlier, the line of division as to the actuality or not of the supernatural characters in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" may be drawn along the axis of whether these characters appear to the Mariner and/or the crew as material

beings, or whether their existence is inferred from dreams and/or circumstance. Accordingly, the crux of their material actuality lies in the manner in which they are introduced to the Mariner and/or the crew and, consequently, the reader. When looking at the Mariner's first acquaintance with Life-in-Death and Death (though they are not named as such until the 1817 version) it is evident that their appearance in the poem is described very much in material, real-world terms. The description of the nearing Spectre-Bark is an instance of sheer realism. One can imagine the Mariner peering at a dot which, as it nears, gradually becomes a ship (a possible bringer of salvation), and which, nearer still, is shown to be a Spectre-Bark; when it is nearest to the Mariner's ship, the crew is seen to be skeletal Death and fair but repulsive Life-in-Death. Though this supernatural visitation has been regarded as a figment of the Mariner's thirst, hunger, grief and heat-stricken mind, there is no denying that the evidential value of such claims relies on inference and inference alone. There is no unequivocal evidence for such a claim and it can therefore only be called assumption. The same is seen when the crew's bodies are reanimated by what will later be revealed as angels; there is no mention of dreams or visions, only visual and realist description. On the other side of this line of division of the actuality or not of supernatural characters in the poem lie those characters whose existence is inferred from circumstance and from dreams, namely the Polar Spirit and the two voices who prosecute the Mariner when he has fallen unconscious after the ship suddenly leapt forward.

Before continuing, however, a discussion of dream-characters in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" warrants a consideration of Coleridge's thoughts and theories on dreams, their origin and their nature. As we know, Coleridge promised (but as so often, never delivered) a lecture on "Dreams, Visions, Ghosts, Witchcraft etc." (Holmes, 1999:168), and from his notebooks we learn that Coleridge himself suffered severe nightmares (one of the side effects of opium abuse). Drawing from Coleridge's notebooks, Kathryn Kimball (2000) writes that "Coleridge attempts to reconcile a rational, 'scientific' explanation of the dreaming mind [like the work of Erasmus Darwin and James Mackintosh] with an equally strong metaphysical, even mystical understanding of its possibilities [as in the work of Emanuel Swedenborg and George Fox]". Kimball further propounds that for Coleridge the subjects of our dreams are less compelling than the inner workings of our minds behind that which constitutes a dream (a notion which curiously echoes Coleridge's *natura naturata* and *natura naturans* division as well as his belief that all words can be etymologically traced back to a verb<sup>15</sup>). To this effect Kimball quotes from Coleridge's notebooks the poet's belief that "SENSE IMPRESSIONS arrive constantly, while awake or asleep, from the external world and create BODILY SENSATIONS OF PAIN/PLEASURE which transmute into PASSIONS & EMOTIONS OF THE MIND which the night-working imagination transmutes into expressive DREAM IMAGES". From this, as well as Coleridge's notes on the role of the imagination during

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<sup>15</sup> See H.J. Jackson, "Coleridge, Etymology and Etymologic" (1983:75-88).

the dreaming process, she draws the following conclusions: 1) that for Coleridge outward sense impressions are transmuted through the sleeping imagination into images which are the product of sleep (with the aid of the imaginative faculty), converting judgements as to the cause of such impressions into the images; 2) that the mind draws on a reservoir of memory (what Coleridge calls “the living catacombs”) when creating dream images; 3) that Coleridge differentiates between the day and night working imaginations, the first of which sees our minds translating impulses from the senses into emotion and the latter reversing this process by translating emotion into images of sense (that is dreaming) and that this implies that 4) “[t]he mind, therefore, which at all times, with and without our distinct consciousness, *seeks for and assumes some outward Causes* for every Impression from without’ and converts these sense impressions into images”.

Returning to the poem, it is observable that three characters’ (earlier identified as the Polar Spirit and the two disembodied voices conversing during the Mariner’s swoon) existence is purely inferred from the dreams of the Mariner and/or the crew as well as certain events which I contest, if one is to rely on Coleridge’s dream theories, are the impulses of the senses which, in the waking state translate into emotion that, in turn, is translated into dream images (or objects of the senses) in the sleeping state. Thus, the inference of the existence of the Polar Spirit. After the accounts of the ontological crisis brought on by the storm and the Antarctic, the shooting of the Albatross, and the short-lived period of smooth sailing, when the ship sits motionless on the Pacific, the first reference to the Polar Spirit is made. That is, when the crew and the Mariner are in their most weakened and hopeless state sitting motionless and without provisions on the Pacific, the Mariner discloses in ll. 127-130 (1798 version) that:

[...] some [members of the crew] in dreams assured were  
Of the Spirit that plagued us so:  
Nine fathom deep he had follow'd us  
From the Land of Mist and Snow

This passage remains unchanged in all the versions of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”. Though the crew and the Mariner (and the glosser of the 1817 version) interpret this dream as an unquestionable vision, when looking at what has been said earlier regarding the faulty Understanding as well as considering that for Coleridge how we dream has more weight than what we dream (at least in terms of dream theory) (Kimball, 2000), one may contend that this might not be the case. Given the ontological crisis and the ensuing erroneous conclusions drawn by the faulty Understanding of the crew and the Mariner, may we not interpret the dreams “some” (l. 127) had of the Polar Spirit as the Coleridgean Understanding at work both in their sleeping state as well as in their waking state when interpreting these dreams? As elucidated above by Kimball (2000), Coleridge held that when asleep the waking process which sees us translating objects of the sense into emotions is reversed, *ergo* emotions are imaginatively translated into

objects of sense when dreaming. Therefore one may begin to theorise that the dreams which assured some of the crew of the existence of an avenging Polar Spirit (seeking vengeance for the Mariner killing the Albatross) are only imaginative images translated from emotions brought on by the terrifying circumstance in which they find themselves. Furthermore, the reader sees the Mariner and the crew even affirming that the depth at which this Spirit follows them is a very specific “nine fathom deep”. It would seem absurd to apply a measurement (used in quantifying the material objects of sense so as to come to an understanding of their nature by the quantification of their attributes) to an entity the attributes and nature of which are essentially unquantifiable. The faulty Understanding is here seen to be further at work when this, the unreliable dreams of a few individuals, are used as primary evidence in the conviction of the Mariner. It therefore seems evident that the dreams some crew members had are the result of emotions (brought on by the dire state in which they find themselves) being translated into objects of the sense and which in turn are mistakenly construed as the absolute truth. Thus the existence of the Polar Spirit is not concrete, as that of Life-in-Death, Death and the angels, because it is a dream image. Seeing as Coleridge held that how we dream is more important than what we dream, it may surely be believed that the crew, guided by their Understanding and its ability to interpret *natura naturata*, was again led astray by their Understanding in that they interpreted what they dream (*natura naturata*), instead of looking into how they dream (*natura naturans*). This, one might go so far as to say, is another form of apostasy, where the crew mistake the product of their Understanding for the ultimate truth. It is a process which, one might argue, lies at the very foundation of superstition, a process which sees the crew convicting the Mariner for a crime which seems to have superstition as its sole witness and which curiously recalls ll. 135-138 of *Religious Musings* (Coleridge, 2009).<sup>16</sup>

This brings this discussion to the two voices the Mariner hears when unconscious. These voices may very well knock off-kilter the argument thus far propounded, seeing as they actively castigate the Mariner, as well as mentioning that he shall pay even more penance, on the basis of his killing of the Albatross. In fact in ll. 398-401 (1817 version) one of the voices states that the Mariner has killed the bird which loved him and which in turn was loved by the Polar Spirit, a passage which remains relatively unchanged in all versions of the poem. Yet when considering that these voices, like the Polar Spirit, are of dream characters whose actuality relies heavily on inference, it seems justifiable that their actuality, and therefore the verity of their statements, may also be questioned. Again, as with the Polar Spirit, evidence appears to corroborate that the two voices are in fact a product of the Mariner’s mind, existing for him purely on the basis that their existence helps relieve

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<sup>16</sup> “O Fiends of Superstition! not that oft  
 The erring Priest hath stained with brother’s blood  
 Your grisly idols, not for this may wrath  
 Thunder against you from the Holy One!”

his ontological crisis through the processes of the Understanding. Looking at what has been argued in terms of the Polar Spirit, the notion that dreams are the opposite of the waking process (which, again, sees objects of the sense translated into emotion (Kimball, 2000)) may once more be employed in assessing why these voices are in fact a product of the Mariner's ontologically wracked mind. Would it not be understandable that the Mariner, convinced of his guilt and being convicted of a crime (whether true or not), would, in a waking state internalise such events (objects of the senses) into emotion which in a sleeping state would again be translated into objects of the senses? This process is most evident in the instance which sees the voices pass judgement on the Mariner and that these voices are consequently, as in the case of the Polar Spirit, not real and that the actuality of their material existence (and therefore the importance of what they say) is merely inferred by the Mariner whose Will is guided by the Understanding, that is dependent on objects of the sense, and that is desperately constructing rules in order to relieve his ontological crisis. As with the mention of the precise depth of the Polar Spirit inferred from the dreams of some of the crew members, the Mariner's Understanding constructs a curiously deductive explanation as to the sudden speed at which the ship travels, an explanation which certainly seems believable seeing as it is propounded in an almost scientific, logical way.

The first voice asks how the ship travels so fast, to which the second answers that, "The air is cut away before/ And closes from behind" ll. 424-425 (1817 version), an answer which remains unchanged in all the versions of the poem. Here, not unlike the reference to the precise depth at which the Polar Spirit is believed to follow the ship, a rational, logical response bordering on the scientific is to be seen; that the ship travels in a constantly forming vacuum which propels it forward. This explanation recalls ll. 29-36 of the 1798 version, which describe the first (uneventful) leg of the ship's journey, that, given the technical maritime references (specifically with regard to navigation), has been earlier alluded to as bordering on the mundane. It seems that the ontological certainty which reigned during the first leg of the journey, evident in this description, seems to be replicated (or at least attempted) in the instance which sees the second voice accounting for the ship's sudden speed; the observation also draws on an apparent understanding of the moon's influence on the tides. Considering the above points, might we not say that the passive Understanding is at work in the Mariner's dream, in that his emotions, which at this point are surely the product of severe ontological anxiety, are translated into objects of the sense, the two voices, of which the second voice serves to alleviate the Mariner's crisis by offering a logical and methodical explanation for the sudden speed at which the ship travels. Notice too how the second voice is the one which offers answers to the first voice's questions, and that the second voice is described "as soft as honey-dew" (l. 407, 1817 version), indicating that these cold, seemingly unquestionable truths as to phenomenal reality act to soothe the Mariner's disturbed state of mind. The first voice, the questioning voice, however, convicts the Mariner of the crime of shooting the Albatross when he asks:

"Is it he? quoth one, "Is this the man?  
"By him who died on cross,  
"With his cruel bow he lay'd full low  
"The harmless Albatross.  
"The spirit who bideth by himself  
"In the land of mist and snow,  
"He lov'd the bird that lov'd the man  
"Who shot him with his bow."

(ll. 403-410, 1798 version)

Notice how the very conviction is framed in a question. It is important to remember that, according to the interpretation here propounded, the voices are in fact products his mind constructs in order to come to terms with what he has experienced and is experiencing. As Coleridge says in *Table Talk* (2003:101):

You will observe, that even in dreams nothing is fancied without an antecedent *\_quasi\_* cause. It could not be otherwise.

In this light it comes as no surprise that the voice which offers concrete answers, answers most probably originating in the Mariner's "memory banks" (that which he knows and has experienced before (Kimball, 2000)), is likened to "honey-dew", while the first, questioning and, indeed, convicting voice is not described as such. It has been noted that the first voice's conviction of the Mariner's crime is framed within a question, and there is much to be read into such a strange manner of phrasing the conviction of a man for a crime. Interpreting both voices as figments of the Mariner's mind, figments produced by the imaginative dreaming process, one may come to understand the role the two voices play in terms of the Mariner's ontology. I contest that they act both to soothe his mind and offer comprehension of his experience. In other words the supernatural is transformed into the phenomenal in order to still the ontological anxiety afforded by the first voice, by attempting to transform it into something from the phenomenal world which is open to the Understanding. The first voice convinces the Mariner (and the 1817 glosser) that his crew was right and that his shooting of the Albatross was indeed a crime against the Polar Spirit, for which the Mariner was now being avenged, a conviction that might not sound soothing at first, but which at least affords the Mariner's human Understanding the ability to see a chain of causality that in turn may help alleviate his sense of ontological crisis. Yet this conviction is still framed within a question, and this may indicate the Mariner's uncertainty as to the precise nature of the crime he perpetrated. The second voice aims to alleviate any trauma the Mariner might experience due to the supernatural movement of the ship by explaining this movement in a methodical and rational way, though it does not explain how the air is cut away before the ship and how it closes from behind. This last observation entrenches the idea that the voice is indeed

a figment of the Mariner's mind, seeing as it, like him, can only speculate – however methodically it may be – as to the phenomenal events unfolding. Neither the second voice nor the Mariner can comprehend which forces (*natura naturans*) are behind such events (*natura naturata*).

Accordingly it may be said that the characters (the Polar Spirit and the two voices) whose existence is inferred from dreams, are the product of the ontological crisis in which the Mariner and the crew find themselves. These characters' existence is the product of emotions brought on by the unfamiliar, making them objects through which the Understanding can attempt to make sense of that with which it is confronted. This is the same process which sees the crew and the Mariner attach religious significance to the Albatross, and it is this which has earlier been identified as their true crime, the guidance of a finite Will by the faulty Understanding and not by Reason, a notion, as propounded above, which Coleridge held to be the basis of apostasy – the Original Sin.

As for the materially actual preternatural characters, which have earlier been identified as Life-in-Death, Death, the reanimated dead crew and the angels which stand atop them, I believe these characters also carry specific symbolic and religious weight.

The description of Life-in-Death reminds one of Milton's Sin in *Paradise Lost*, once altogether fair, though still fair from above the waist,<sup>17</sup> whilst Death in "The Rime", save for the crown and dart, resembles Milton's Death. Life-in-Death is described in terms which frame her as both beautiful and horrendous. Her skin is fair, though compared to leprosy, her hair blonde and her lips red. Though the hair, lips and skin of Sin are not described in *Paradise Lost*, we are told that (prior to the Fall) the inhabitants of Heaven when they beheld Sin "recoild affraid/ At first" (Book II, ll. 759-760), but that as time passed Sin "pleas'd, and with attractive graces won/ The most averse" (Book II, ll. 762-763). From Book II of *Paradise Lost* it is also shown that Sin and Death sit together guarding the Gates of Hell and that they are released upon the world and Eden when Sin unlocks the Gates for Satan. Sin and Death are shown to have an incestuous relationship, of which the hell hounds tearing at Sin's entrails are the product. In Book II Sin tells Lucifer that Death is her "Son and foe" (l. 804), but, even though he is her foe, that he cannot destroy her, for "he [Death] knows/ His end with mine involvd; and knows that I/ Should prove a bitter Morsel, and his bane" (ll. 806-808). Death is also known to be an aggressive character who does not suffer himself, like Sin, but who takes pleasure in human pain and the infliction thereof. So, of Milton's Sin and Death we know that they are companions, we know that they do not like one another, but that they cannot destroy one another as their fates are intertwined.<sup>18</sup> In "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" the reader is presented with the fact that Life-in-Death and Death travel as companions and that

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<sup>17</sup> See *Paradise Lost*, Book II, ll. 746-765.

<sup>18</sup> A notion repeated throughout the Bible. As in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord".

they are in competition. Also, the narrator (in the 1798 version of the poem) remarks in l. 180 that Death (though not named as such in the original version) is Life-in-Death's "fleshless Pheere" (meaning husband, spouse or mate). The exclamation of Life-in-Death after she has won the dice game as well as the notion that out of the crew of 201 men (including the Mariner) she has won only one,<sup>19</sup> may prompt the reader to believe Death is dominant over Life-in-Death. The same holds true for the relationship between Death and Sin in *Paradise Lost*, where Sin's fear of Death indicates his dominant status in their relationship. What is more, according to Christian theology, a life of sin is a life of spiritual death from which only Christ can save an individual, thus the notion of rebirth through Christ.<sup>20</sup> Also, Life-in-Death seems to the Mariner to be more like Death than Death itself (l. 189, 1798 version). From this it is evident that Life-in-Death, in Christian allegorical terms, represents Sin, while Death represents the product or wage of sin. Furthermore, Life-in-Death and Death travel by bark, forming a type of satanic inversion of the Bark of St. Peter which, instead of saving souls through Christ, punishes and damns those who have sinned against God. Accordingly, claims such as those of Bostetter (1962) which negate a Christian reading of the poem on the presumption that the crew's death is capricious and not the work of a benevolent God come into question. I have earlier shown that the crew is complicit in the Mariner's sin in that they too, through the guidance of the Will not by Reason but by twisted Understanding, commit apostasy by ascribing religious power and significance to objects of the sense such as the Albatross. Accordingly, seeing as the crew has committed what for Coleridge was the Original Sin, they are doomed to die, death being the wage for their sin.

From the above analysis emerges a clear theology. The theology thus propounded in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" would seem to coincide with the Warren (1958) tradition of interpreting the poem as a tale of fall, penance and redemption, but the cause of the fall, the nature of the penance as well as the nature of redemption and those who are redeemed, differ greatly from the Warren tradition. The fall is not the Mariner's own, but, as previously discussed, the whole crew's, seeing as their Will, which for Coleridge would be a finite Will, is led not by Reason but by the serpentine Understanding which relies on objects of the senses (*natura naturata*) and through which *natura naturans*, or the constituent opposing forces behind phenomenal reality, cannot be apprehended. Their attempted apprehension of such forces leads to the Mariner and the crew

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<sup>19</sup> Some may contend that she has won 200 men seeing as they later rise as living dead. However, the revelation that that which animates the dead men are angels resists such an interpretation. The glosser also states that she has won the Mariner, but seeing as I have earlier shown the glosser to be an imperfect interpreter of events, his words are not to be held at face value. Further, the 1798 version of the poem shows Death's role in the deaths of the crew more evidently (ll. 195-198).

<sup>20</sup> In Genesis 2:17 God says to Adam, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die". When Adam eats the fruit, he does not die and this notion must imply another death, a spiritual death. This notion is repeated numerous times in the Bible, notably in Ephesians 2:1 ("And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins"), Colossians 2:13, John 11:25, Titus 3:5 and Revelation 21:8.

ascribing supernatural and religious significance to objects of the sense; a superstitious process which seems almost idolatrous and through which they apostatise. This process signifies, once more, what Barfield describes as the detachment of a part from its source, becoming a separate individual, a process aided by imperfect Understanding and a process which promulgates a perpetual reliance of the finite Will on the Understanding (1971:155). This is a process which Coleridge in his 1818-1819 lecture on philosophy<sup>21</sup> held to be the basis of pantheism (which he considered the basis of polytheism)<sup>22</sup>. A re-attachment of the part to its source can accordingly only be brought about when the individual Understanding is delivered by the Imagination to superindividual Reason, thus beginning the realization of the opposite of apostasy, which is redemption.

In the above discussion, the nature of the crime committed by the Mariner has been identified and has been shown to be a crime in which the crew implicate themselves, and this has been identified as a type of “fall”. Penance for this crime has also been discussed through references to the crew’s death and the Mariner’s terrible journey and the circumstances he endures. Of redemption, as the reader might by now be aware, very little has been said. Consequently, this difficult and convoluted concept of redemption as it figures in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, will now be discussed, after which it shall be shown how the theological aspects of the poem tie in with the Gothic, and how these aspects themselves are peculiar to what has been coined a Gothic theology.

The Warren tradition holds that the Mariner is redeemed when he blesses the water snakes after which the symbol of his crime (the Albatross) falls into the ocean and the Mariner is enabled to pray. Yet, as Bostetter keenly points out, this tradition fails to comment on the condition of the Mariner after he returns to his own country. Can he truly be redeemed if he is forced to wander the land telling his story; an act which is the only thing that can relieve him from the tremendous pain he suffers before its telling? This seems to be in conflict with the Christian notion of redemption. Yet, it is this very process which I contend to be the cornerstone of the theology Coleridge advances in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”.

Seeing as the poem is for the most part told by the Mariner, it may be deduced that, despite the fact that he has told his tale countless times, he has not realised the nature of the crime as

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<sup>21</sup> “The other race determined that their imagination, as the Scriptures properly call it, but which they deemed their understanding or their reason, should be the judge of all things ... they followed the natural leadings of the imagination or fancy governed by the law of association ... Wherever, therefore, they saw motion, they supposed that in some way or other there was a vital or motive power; and ... conceived that the whole world, every thing, must have a motive power” (As quoted by Harding (2012:503)).

<sup>22</sup> This process is also foreshadowed in the Latin epigraph from Thomas Burnet’s *Archaeologiae Philosophicae*, added in 1817, which warns that though there are preternatural forces (both visible and invisible), we should ponder upon these things with caution lest we fail to differentiate between what is certain and what is not.

proposed above. The Mariner continues to believe that the Albatross has immense religious significance, which implies that killing it was a crime against God because God and the Polar Spirit had loved the bird. Furthermore, he believes in the actuality of the Polar Spirit and its vengeance as well as the actuality of the two voices he hears in his swoon. In short, the Mariner does not realise the true nature of his crime and mistakes it for something else. Yet, he tells this tale to individuals he immediately identifies as individuals to whom his tale must be told. In ll. 619-623 the Mariner states that:

I pass, like night, from land to 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.

In l. 587 (1834 version) we are told that “I [the Mariner] have strange power of speech”, a fact that is sorely apparent in the way in which the Mariner’s telling of his tale binds the Wedding-Guest, who “listens like a three years’ child” (l. 15 1834 version). The fact that the identification of the individuals to whom he must teach his tale occurs *ab extra* along with the “strange powers of speech” bequeathed to him after his harrowing journey, along with the theological significance of his tale, suggests that he is divinely inspired to seek those who would be left “sadder” but crucially “wiser” after the telling of his tale. From Biblical figures like Moses<sup>23</sup> and Jeremiah<sup>24</sup> we are told that God can bless individuals with an extraordinary power of speech in order for them to do His will and consequently proselytise others. Drawing on the original 1798 version of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, McQueen identifies the moment after the Mariner’s thirst is quenched by the rain and the sails are shaken by the “roaring wind” of ll. 301-304 as resembling the moment when the Holy Spirit descends on the disciples during the Pentecost in the Book of Acts (2014:29), recalling that the connection between the Holy Spirit and wind is most prevalent in the Bible. McQueen identifies further similarities between this scene in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and the Pentecost by identifying the striking similarities between the “tongues” (Acts 2:2-3) and the “flags” of fire which descend on both the disciples and the Mariner (ll. 305-306) (*ibid.*, 32). He believes this instance in the poem to allude to the instance in the Book of Acts where the Holy Spirit descends as tongues of fire into the disciples, thereby enabling them to spread the Word of God.<sup>25</sup> However, in the cases of Moses, Jeremiah, the disciples, and Job (alluded to earlier), God revealed himself. In the case of the Mariner we have an individual who does not know the true theological implications of the tale he is telling nor the origin of his supernatural narrative ability,

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<sup>23</sup> See Exodus 4:10-16.

<sup>24</sup> See Jeremiah 1:9.

<sup>25</sup> See Acts 3-5.

an individual who is also oblivious to the reasons as to why specific individuals are immediately identified as an obligatory audience, and why the telling of his story to them subsequently relieves his agony. This notion reminds us very much of Jeremiah, who says that the Lord's word is "as a burning fire shut up in my bones" (Jeremiah 20:9). An implied commonality of agony associated with suppressing the words is evident in both Jeremiah and the Mariner. This would in turn imply that the Mariner's survival of the ordeal at sea and his strange, almost hypnotic ability to tell his tale is by divine design with the purpose of spreading the will and the Word of God, and in so doing proselytise others who are recipient to this Coleridgean theology.

Drawing from *Aids to Reflection*, Harding writes that Coleridge, in his "studies of the New Testament similarly emphasized the prophetic: not the foretelling of a future event (the kind of millennialist reading for which he excoriated the preacher Edward Irving), but the sense that these writings were meant to work an effective change on their auditors and readers, a '*Passing into a new mind*'" (2012:511). Furthermore, Harding asserts that "[w]hat emerges most strongly from Coleridge's public utterances on classical and biblical literature is his belief in the power of narrative, including mythic narrative, to raise human communities to a higher sense of their responsibilities: in short, the power of certain myths to function as what Coleridge named 'philosophemes' [principles of reasoning]" (ibid., 509). If the Mariner's tale is a mythic narrative, what is the theological principle of reasoning therein?

The Mariner and crew's apostatising results in a pantheistic, superstitious world-view which sees them ascribing religious significance to objects of the sense (mostly objects of nature), and that borders on a kind of polytheism. The key word here is superstition, which, as illustrated above, arises from an attempted comprehension of the supersensuous through the sensuous Understanding. It is my conviction that the Mariner has not been delivered from his perpetual reliance on the Understanding, and this is why he continues to tell his story as an act of penance. However, those to whom he tells his story are able to see the Mariner and the crew's folly, because they are after all left "sadder" and "wiser" when they rise the day after the tale has been told, as in the case of the Wedding-Guest, who is initially quick to dismiss the Mariner in l. 11 (1834 version) as a "grey-beard loon". Is it not strange that the apparently mad tale of an apparent madman should leave one sadder and wiser? I am convinced that such a mental state can only be brought about by a tale that has some world-view-altering significance, the conveyance of a principle of reasoning through a mythic narrative. But the nature of this philosopheme garners questions as to its validity in terms of the time at which Coleridge wrote "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner".

At this point the reader may very well contest this chapter's seemingly blind acceptance that Coleridge believed in the Original Sin despite the fact that he, at the inception of "The Rime of the

Ancient Mariner” in 1797, was still an ardent Unitarian and not the more reflective Trinitarian of 1805 onwards. The denial of Original Sin and Christ’s divinity are after all cornerstones of Unitarian theology, and would therefore presumably be relegated to the status of mere superstition by a Unitarian. Accordingly, an assumption as to Coleridge’s belief in Original Sin would seem anachronistic. Yet, Kitson indicates that for Coleridge, in his Bristol lectures of 1795 (specifically his lecture on revealed religion), the chief hindrance to theism “was the problem of the existence of evil” (2012:165). Kitson holds that during this period, Coleridge turned to the optimistic solution to this problem proffered by such thinkers as Shaftesbury and Leibniz, while his more immediate sources were the Associationist ideas of Hartley and Priestley, from which he drew on the idea that “knowledge is created by the external world and its action on our senses”, and that “knowledge and thought are entirely governed by the association of ideas according to their spatial and temporal contiguity” (Kitson, 2012:166-8). From this doctrine of Necessity the young Coleridge would come to believe that “as such environments were arranged by God, then all actions and events were part of a predetermined and benevolent purpose” and that “all evil must be illusory” (ibid., 166); and as Kitson points out Coleridge even went so far as to state that “there is not one Pain but which is somehow or other the effect of moral Evil” (ibid.). Kitson does, however, state that Coleridge was to abandon this Necessitarian optimism to some extent after the death of his son Berkeley in 1798. Holmes too indicates Coleridge’s interest and concerns regarding moral Evil and its origins during his Bristol lectures; these questions would, as Holmes rightfully asserts and as illustrated above, come to be a central theme in Coleridge’s poetry (2005:97). Looking at the role of human Understanding in the guidance of the finite Will as it figures in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” no great leap has to be made in order to detect the semblance between Coleridge’s early ideas on the origin and role of evil and the theological interpretation proffered thus far in this chapter, Unitarian or not. Yet “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” was written two years after these lectures, two years during which Coleridge undoubtedly revised some of the more fervent and optimistic ideas he held before the French Reign of Terror. And four years prior to 1802 (1798) saw Coleridge admitting in a letter to his brother George that he believed “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; and we sometimes see the good without wishing to attain it, and oftener \_wish\_ it without the energy that wills and performs” (Coleridge, 1895:168). But nowhere does Coleridge assert that Original Sin, as it is presented in the tale of Adam and Eve in Genesis, is unquestionably and literally true. He does however, as is made abundantly clear, see the importance of the truths proffered in such mythological texts. So one might conjecture that 1797 is a year that for Coleridge may be earmarked as a year of liminality both in terms of his philosophical and theological convictions and endeavours as indicated by the quote from the *Biographia Literaria* with which this chapter began. Whether we become sinful or whether human

beings are born sinful, it is clear that Coleridge for the greater part of his life believed the human Understanding to be pivotal to the human condition of moral Evil or Original Sin, whether the Understanding and our animal propensity to rely strongly on it is innate or learned. As Harding claims of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, it theologically foreshadows much of what the older Coleridge would later translate into prose works such as *Aids to Reflection*, the *Biographia Literaria* and *The Statesman’s Manual* (2012:516)<sup>26</sup>.

Having identified the theological principles proffered in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (in correlation with Coleridge’s then current theological convictions), it is observable that the working of and human reliance on the Understanding and Fancy did for Coleridge lead to superstition, which sees the finite individual Will disconnected from the centre of creation, which is God. Accordingly, both for the Unitarian Coleridge of 1797 as well as the Trinitarian Coleridge of 1805 onwards, superstition, its causes and effects (effects earlier identified as including pantheism and polytheism), is a cornerstone of moral evil and sin. In *Aids to Reflection* Coleridge states that:

But in all superstition there is a heart of unbelief; and, \_vice versa\_, where a man's belief is but a superficial acquiescence, credulity is the natural result and accompaniment, if only he be not required to sink into the depths of his being, where the sensual man can no longer draw breath.

(1884:207)

This is a notion Coleridge also argues in the second chapter of the *Biographia Literaria* where he says:

A debility and dimness of the imaginative power, and a consequent necessity of reliance on the immediate impressions of the senses, do, we know well, render the mind liable to superstition and fanaticism.

(2004:10)

It is this rendering of the mind to superstition and fanaticism which Coleridge repeatedly identified with the doctrine of the Catholic Church<sup>27</sup> and to which, in *Aids to Reflection*, he would refer to as

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<sup>26</sup> A notion which in 1829, Coleridge himself would come to admit in “The Garden of Boccaccio” when, in ll. 46-56, the speaker states:

And last, a matron now, of sober mien,  
Yet radiant still and with no earthly sheen,  
Whom as a faery child my childhood woo’d  
Even in my dawn of thought—Philosophy;  
Though then unconscious of herself, pardie,  
She bore no other name than Poesy;  
And, like a gift from heaven, in lifeful glee,  
That had but newly left a mother’s knee,  
Prattled and play’d with bird and flower, and stone,  
As if with elfin playfellows well known,  
And life reveal’d to innocence alone.

<sup>27</sup> See “Catholicism and Polytheism: Britain’s Colonies and Coleridge’s Politics”, by Tim Fulford (1999).

the “tyranny of Papal and Brahman superstition” making its followers “slaves to superstition” in need of salvation (1884:40-41). One may come to understand, in this light, the reasons behind Coleridge’s choosing the Gothic as a genre in which to propose his theological principles evident in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”.

Chapter One of this dissertation made mention of the Gothic’s obsession with Catholicism and how this helped to shape the Gothic, especially the Gothic novel, as genre. Milbank investigates Gothic theology and its propensity of “combining [...] Protestant triumphalism and an Enlightenment critique of Catholicism as engendering superstitious darkness” (2016:361). He argues that the Gothic novel makes a double gesture to the Catholic past by both rejecting and reconstruing it (ibid., 362). Continuing from the importance of individuals affiliated with Unitarianism such as Anna Letitia Barbauld (neè Aikin), her brother John and Anne Radcliffe (whose uncle, Thomas Bentley, was a leading Unitarian), Milbank investigates the reasons behind why such a rational faith contributed to the rise of the Gothic novel. This notion has been proposed as one of the main reasons behind Radcliffe’s demystified, “explained supernatural”, where things assumed to be preternatural at first, are shown in fact to be quite natural, thereby demonstrating the female protagonist’s (usually) superstitious fears to be ungrounded and to have a rational explanation. Ellis also points to Radcliffe’s “explained supernatural” as a device employed “in order to reconcile Protestant incredulity and taste for ghostly terror” (2000:26-27). It is therefore noticeable that Coleridge’s opting for the Gothic as a genre in which to castigate superstition, a very Catholic notion for him, is hardly shocking, as the approach was quite prevalent at the time. What does surprise one, is why Coleridge would make use of such a genre (which in numerous reviews he demeaned as base, vulgar and too sensually horrid) to embody his high ideas on theology and other matters. However, an understanding of the reasons behind Coleridge’s use of the Gothic can only hope to be reached after a discussion of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” as a Gothic work.

If one is to view “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” against an inventory of essential attributes or generic typifiers of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century Gothic, it would immediately become apparent that the poem both conforms to and transposes these often stereotypical characteristics of the genre (discussed in the previous chapter), the essence of which Coleridge in 1810, in a light-hearted letter to Wordsworth suggesting a rekindling of their literary cooperation, would roll off as a “recipe” or “scheme” for the “Romance in Mrs. Radcliffe’s style” “and all romances *a priori*” (Holmes, 1999:209). This “recipe” according to Coleridge, as quoted by Holmes, is:

A Baron or a Baroness ignorant of their Birth, and in some dependent situation – Castle – on a Rock – a Sepulchre – at some distance from the Rock – Deserted Rooms – Underground

Passages – Pictures – a ghost, or so believed – or – a written record – blood on it! – a wonderful  
Cut throat – etc. etc. etc.

(1999:209)

In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge would again proffer (this time referring to “the so called German drama” (Coleridge, 2004:143) – what would today be referred to as Gothic drama) this generic formula of Gothic fiction. Here, more succinctly than in the quotation above, Coleridge summarises this formula as “the ruined castles, the dungeons, the trap-doors, the skeletons, the flesh-and-blood ghosts and the perpetual moonshine of a modern author” (2004:142). Though some of the items in Coleridge’s “recipe” can be identified in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” (ghosts, skeletons and the like), it is also apparent that Coleridge transcends the burlesque elements of this “recipe” in the poem.

Foremost among the transpositions Coleridge makes is shifting the setting from the traditional “shaking tapestry, reverberating voices, nodding pictures, long corridors, deserted west towers, north towers, and south towers, ruined chapels, suspicious vaults, damp charnel-houses, great clocks striking twelve, wood embers expiring, dying lamps, and total darkness” of Walpole, Lewis and Radcliffe, to a ship traversing the oceans.<sup>28</sup> Drawing from Koontz’s *Writing Popular Fiction*, Williams contends that the setting, in fiction in general and specifically Gothic fiction, should be just as much a character as the characters themselves. That “specific [Gothic] decor is not [as] important as the setting’s power to evoke certain responses in the characters (and in the reader): claustrophobia, loneliness, a sense of antiquity, recognition that this is a place of secrets” (1995:39-40). Setting is problematic when discussing the poem, seeing as one may argue that the ship is the setting, but because the ship itself travels from the Mariner’s native country to the Antarctic, then to the Pacific and then back again to the harbour from which the ship set sail, and because these settings or landscapes and their atmospheres differ and consequently have a different effect on the Mariner, the plot and the reader, this therefore qualifies them as settings in their own right. One should also be reminded that the poem is framed within a wedding, which presumably takes place in the Mariner’s native country. It would seem, then, the various oceanic settings notwithstanding, that the Mariner’s native country and the ship are the two most sustained settings in the poem.

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<sup>28</sup> These characteristic features of the Gothic setting appear in Mary Charlton’s *Rosella: or, Modern Occurrence, a Novel* (1800), and the passage is found in Snodgrass (2005:159). Here it is important to note that even in the relatively early stages of the effulgence of the British Gothic novel (at the time of composition of Charlton’s *Rosella*, a mere five years after the publication of Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*) these characteristic settings of the Gothic are not only identified, but (if one reads *Rosella*), also defended. This indicates that by the time Coleridge was composing “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel”, these features of the Gothic novel were already deeply embedded in the minds and literary tastes of the general British reading public. A transgression of these features would therefore seem most noteworthy and as a consequence intentional.

The ship is transformed from the sturdy enough vessel of Parts 1 and 2, to the dilapidated bark with tattered sails and a moribund crew of Part 3. Its appearance remains unchanged in Part 4, except that its deck is littered with the non-decaying bodies of its crew. In Parts 5 and 6 it becomes a phantasmagorical ghost ship, driven by the reanimated bodies of its dead crew. Coleridge's shifting of his Gothic tale from the traditional castles, abbeys, monasteries and dungeons of the late eighteenth century British Gothic, to a ship which gradually becomes a ghost ship was indeed innovative, at least at the time at which he wrote "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Patrick Bridgewater notes that the ghost ship of Gothic fiction has its origins in the medieval Demonic Frigate,<sup>29</sup> and that although the *Seeräuberroman* (pirate novel and/or romance) of earlier British authors, such as Jonathan Swift's *Captain Singleton* (1720), was not uncommon, it had more to do with pirates than it had to do with the Gothic (2013:45). Bridgewater states that:

In the high Gothic and post-Gothic period the pirate and ghost-ship novel begins in German [...] with two significant novels, Bornschein's *Antonia della Roccini, die Seeräuberkönigin* (1801) and *Der Seeräuberkönig* (1803) and includes Alexis's Gothic *Walladmor* (1824), [and] Hauff's *Gespenserschiff* (1826[)] [...]. In English the genre begins a little later with 'Vanderdecken's Message Home' (*Blackwood's*, 1821), and includes Scott's *The Pirate* (1821), Cooper's *The Red Rover* (1827), and Marryat's *The Phantom Ship* (1839). The Maritime Gothic in the form of the ghost-ship or ship of the dead is essentially a joint Anglo-German enterprise.

(Ibid.)

Drawing from Bridgewater (2013), whilst recalling that Coleridge started composition on "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in 1797, it is evident that Coleridge was ahead of his time in terms of his maritime Gothic setting; even ahead of the Gothic trend-setting German novelists. Thus, Coleridge replaces the ruined and/or imposing and rather static castles, dungeons, abbeys and monasteries of Radcliffe, Walpole and Lewis, for a ship which not only fluctuates in location and therefore also setting, but which gradually changes from what one might call a run-of-the-mill sailing ship (when the Mariner and crew leave the harbour), to something more horrible and ghostly (almost resembling the Spectre-Bark) upon the Mariner's return. This process itself attests to Williams' (1995) claims that the setting itself is a character, which in this instance becomes apparent through the ship's continually altering appearance (and eventual disappearance) in a manner which resembles character development. What is more, the ship is a setting which does affect "claustrophobia, isolation" and "a sense of antiquity" for the reader and the characters (Williams, 1995:39-40). Yet, the very nature of the ship implies that it is not fixed as the archetypal Gothic castle and that it transports the Mariner and the crew to other settings which are Williams'

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<sup>29</sup> See Sir Walter Scott's *Rokeby* (1813). The Demon Frigate features prominently in Scott's *Rokeby* (1813), but Birkhead (*in* Hogle & Bomarito, 2006:20) identifies its origins in mediaeval legends along with other legends such as the Wandering Jew and Dr. Faustus.

“place[s] of secrets” (1995:40) – places like the confounding and terrific Antarctic and magical Pacific with its loneliness and the magical terror and beauty of its burning waters and snakes. Accordingly, it is evident that the ship as setting has as its core attributes its ability to transmute to other settings whilst paradoxically affecting claustrophobia, as well as its gradually changing appearance. Subsequently, with regard to setting as it features in the poem as opposed to the archetypal settings of Gothic fiction, one can discern that Coleridge breaks the Gothic norm and thereby innovates and invigorates an often hackneyed aspect of an often clichéd genre.

Jerrold Hogle proffers that the “Gothic has come to be the oxymoronic textual place where Coleridge can locate many feared contradictions” (2005:21). One of these contradictions, which is not only oxymoronic but also ironic, is the fact that the ship, a vehicle the very existence of which is based on the human need to travel and to connect people, is the setting which becomes a claustrophobic prison cell which traps the Mariner and the crew, much as castle Udolpho is used by Montoni to imprison Emily St. Aubert and her aunt. As I have illustrated above, the ship itself, no matter what drives it, goes on a veritable tour of settings which confound and challenge the ontological certainty of the Mariner, the crew and indeed the Wedding-Guest and the reader; settings such as the Antarctic and the supernaturally charged Pacific Ocean, which confront the reader with images of the sublime. Sublime settings are important, because “something in us asks for the contrived reproduction of conditions to induce a real response of fear in order to jolt us out of the complacency produced by the equally contrived nature of everyday life in an increasingly industrialised, technologised and commercialised society” (Faflak, 2016:95-96). Elaborating on the Radcliffian sublime, Milbank notes that what is apparent here is not the Kantian sublime in which Reason is the source of the sublime, that nature is merely a catalyst which arouses the mind into an active state, but that “[t]he mountains [in Radcliffe’s *The Romance of the Forrest*] become both an obscuring veil *and* the means of access to God’s presence [...] veils are in that sense apocalyptic: revelations” (2016:373). This coincides with what Chayes (1965:88) elucidates when she recalls the “veils” of mist the crew experience in the Antarctic as well as the mist in Coleridge’s famous analogy in a mountainous parable in the *Biographia Literaria*, in which he differentiates between transcendental and transcendent philosophy and philosophers (2004:60). In proposing the highest and most difficult philosophical truths and ideals to be reached by the philosopher, Coleridge’s lofty parable instructs that:

Its higher ascents are too often hidden by mists and clouds from uncultivated swamps, which few have courage or curiosity to penetrate. To the multitude below these vapours appear, now as the dark haunts of terrific agents, on which none may intrude with impunity; and now all aglow, with colours not their own, they are gazed at as the splendid palaces of happiness and power.

This, I believe, is a stunning instance in which Coleridge not only illustrates the hidden sublimity implicit in the search for philosophical truths, but also geographical sublimity so evident in his portrayal of the Antarctic and the Pacific in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”. Though this excerpt was written many years after the composition of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, Holmes states that (quoting from Clement Carlyon’s recollection of his time spent with Coleridge in Germany in May of 1799) Coleridge, while ascending the Brocken – when pressed for a satisfactory definition of the sublime – said it consisted “in a suspension of the powers of comparison” (2005:230). Accordingly, informed by Coleridge’s ideas on the Understanding, one may argue that the sublime as it figures in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” also consists “in a suspension of the powers of comparison” and would therefore be a notion the very nature and primary goal of which is to confound the ordering mechanism which creates rules through which we form an ontology of the phenomenal world; that is, the Understanding. Confronted with the sublime settings of the Antarctic and the Pacific, the Mariner and the crew physically penetrate these mists (in the Antarctic); however, their reliance on their Understanding causes an inability to penetrate these mists metaphysically. This is a condition which, as illustrated throughout this chapter, gives rise to apostasy and therefore to the Original Sin. Confronted with these sublime settings the Mariner and the crew effectuate a type of speculation, characterized by Coleridge in the *Biographia* as “those flights of lawless speculation which, abandoned by all distinct consciousness, [...] transgressing the bounds and purposes of our intellectual faculties, those are justly condemned, as transcendent” (2004:60).

Accordingly, of the natural settings, such as the Antarctic and Pacific, one may confirm what Milbank identifies as a “theological trope common to Gothic as well as Romantic literature [...] the natural sublime, whereby the elevated and obscure, the terrifying and tremendous qualities of natural phenomena baulk and/or elevate the viewer” (2016:372-373). Such an identification however, hardly seems a difficult one to make, but the implications thereof in relation to Gothic literary and theological tradition, as Milbank illustrates, are less conspicuous though of utmost importance, nonetheless. Milbank contends that “Gothic fiction in the Radcliffian tradition is particularly drawn to scenes of romantic beauty experienced properly by characters of moral worth, who do not aggrandise themselves in response to the [...] scenery [...] but accept the divine authorship of the works of nature” (ibid., 372). The Mariner does not aggrandise himself in response to the scenery of the Antarctic and Pacific directly, but neither does he, for the greater part of the poem (as is evident in the theological discussion above), experience it properly. The Mariner and the crew, in response to these sublime settings, which suspend and confound their powers of comparison, do not accept the divine authorship thereof, but rather utilise their Understanding in forcing a contrived comprehension on these settings, thereby sedating their ontological crisis through their superstitious (almost pagan) insistence on the actuality and power of characters such as the Polar Spirit and the Albatross. Milbank comments in the following way

on Elizabeth and Victor Frankenstein's respective stances towards nature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*:

Elizabeth's acceptance of the divine cause of nature leads to social virtues; Victor's Promethean arrogation of divine power is wholly disastrous and brings nothing but death.

(2016:374)

Aspects of both Victor Frankenstein and Elizabeth are discernible in the Mariner, in that he and the crew, like Victor Frankenstein, apostatise in not accepting the divine authorship of nature, but rather (unlike the scientific Victor) choose to be led by their Understanding and therefore superstition. It is only when the Mariner realises the beauty of the water snakes and blesses them unawares, that the tide begins to turn in a more favourable direction. This act in itself sees the Mariner accepting the divine authorship of nature (like Elizabeth), instead of aggrandising the human Understanding whilst, as argued above, realising through the snakes the grace afforded through Original Sin, which is not of divine authorship. This, subsequently, generates what Milbank identifies as a "commonality [of the] theological project" of both Gothic prose and Romantic poetry, which is to "seek to find a way to connect self and world, and to give voice to nature" (2016:374). Whether the Mariner manages to connect in such a way is contestable, and informs a discussion of the Mariner as Gothic character in what follows.

When viewing the Mariner against the backdrop of Gothic mythology and the classic late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century Gothic topos, it is evident that, depending on the specific reading of the poem, the Mariner as a Gothic character has been associated with, disassociated from, and reassociated with the various models of archetypal Gothic characters. These models include the male villain, the male victim of supernatural forces, the Faustian overreacher (Chayes, 1965), even the vampire (Twitchell, 1977), and – most importantly to this chapter – as the Wandering Jew. Like John Livingstone Lowes in his highly influential *The Road to Xanadu* (1927:250-253) and a great many other scholars, Fulmer (1969), Christopher Stokes (2011:10) and Mary Ellen Snodgrass (2005:356) place the Mariner in the tradition of the Wandering Jew, a Gothic archetype often associated with Lucifer, Cain and Ahasuerus

According to Snodgrass, the Wandering Jew is a hero/villain-type character who originates in mediaeval legend as a Roman who mocked Jesus as Jesus was making his way to his execution (2005:356). As a result the Roman, identified as Joseph Cartaphilus, was cursed with immortality and forced to roam the earth, forever seeking the sweet release of death, often telling his tale to those who could not choose but hear (ibid.). Snodgrass also elaborates on this Gothic archetype by indicating how it figures in famous Gothic characters such as "Ambrosio, the hero/villain in Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796); [...] and Father Schemoli in Charles Robert Maturin's

*The Fatal Revenge: or, The Family of Montorio* (1807)", as well as in other Gothic works such as "the title character in Christian Friedrich Schubart's *Der Ewige Jude: Eine Lyrische Rhapsodie* (The wandering Jew: A lyric rhapsody, 1783); a questing alchemist in William Godwin's *St. Leon* (1799); a mysterious traveller in Charles Robert Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* 1820); and the reviled protagonist in George Croly's *Salathiel, the Wandering Jew* (1828)" (2005:356). Both Lowes and Fulmer point to the prevalence of the Wandering Jew in the writings, reading habits and knowledge in Coleridge's social circles, as well as his own reading prior to and during his composition of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Lowes references Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (containing an ancient ballad of "The Wandering Jew"), Schiller's *The Robbers*, and Matthew Lewis' *The Castle Spectre* and *The Mad Monk*, as literary sources featuring the Wandering Jew, from which Coleridge drew in the construction of the Mariner's character (1927:244-251).

Essential attributes often ascribed to the Wandering Jew are evident in descriptions such as "earthly demon, the aged scorner [...] the unwilling immortal, the supreme literary symbol of alienation, otherness, and perpetual penitence" (Snodgrass, 2005:356). Adding to this the fact of his continual survival, his eternal suffering as identified by Punter (*in* Bomarito & Hogle, 2006:320), and the detail of the Wandering Jew's glittering eye (Fulmer, 1969), this figure might surely be seen as the prototype of the Mariner. But as early as 1927 Lowes argued that the Mariner is not simply the Wandering Jew in naval garb. Lowes bluntly states that "the Mariner is *not* the Wandering Jew. Coleridge's art is not so crass as that"; for Lowes the Mariner is "essentially a new creation, of associations that had long been gathering about an accepted and mysterious personality of legend" (1927:250). I believe, however, by investigating the "associations", the attributes the Mariner shares with the Wandering Jew, one may gain insight not only into the role of the Mariner as a Gothic character (and his character as a whole), but also into the inner workings of how Coleridge interacts with the Gothic topos – here confirming, here transcending – in the creation of a character such as the Mariner.

We know that Coleridge reviewed Lewis' *The Monk* in *The Critical Review* in February 1797, and Lowes (and other scholars informed by Lowes' work) contests that Coleridge's reading of *The Monk* had much to do with the creation of a character such as the Mariner (1927:245). Indeed, it is clear from Coleridge's review that one of the characters who most impressed him was that of the Great Mogul, who turns out to be the Wandering Jew. This is evident when Coleridge famously states that "we could not easily recollect a bolder or more happy conception than that of the burning cross on the forehead of the wandering Jew (a mysterious character, which, though copied as to its more prominent features from Schiller's incomprehensible Armenian, does, nevertheless, display great vigour of fancy)". It is surely more than a coincidence that Lewis' Wandering Jew should bear the mark of the burning cross on his forehead as a mark of his sin

as Cain bears a mark and the Mariner the Albatross. The idea that there is a relation between the mark of the cross of Lewis' Wandering Jew and the Albatross of the Mariner is reinforced when in ll. 141-142 (1817 version) the Mariner states that, "Instead of the cross, the Albatross/ About my neck was hung". What is more, both Lowes and Fulmer (1969) point to the fact the Mariner, like the Wandering Jew, passes "like night from land to land" (l. 586, 1817) and has "a strange power of speech" (l. 587, 1817). This very much reminds us of Lewis' Great Mogul, or Wandering Jew, when we learn his true identity through Don Raymond, when he tells that

when I related this adventure to my uncle, the cardinal-duke, he told me, that he had no doubt of this singular man's being the celebrated character known universally by the name of the wandering Jew. His not being permitted to pass more than fourteen days on the same spot, the burning cross impressed upon his forehead, the effect which it produced upon the beholders, and many other circumstances, gave this supposition the colour of truth.

(Lewis, 2002:162)

In the light of Don Raymond's account it is plain that the Mariner shares a number of characteristics with the Wandering Jew; a mark of sin, the effects produced on his listeners, eternal wandering and, in other instances in *The Monk*, glittering eyes, old age, being well-travelled and, very importantly, having the ability to exorcize supernatural entities such as the Bleeding Nun – an ability which will become especially relevant at the conclusion of this chapter.

But, conspicuous as the resemblances among the Mariner, Lewis' Wandering Jew, and the Wandering Jew of mediaeval legend are, Lowes contends, as indicated above, that the Mariner is a composite character of which the Wandering Jew merely makes one part (1927:249-259). Accordingly, for Lowes, the Mariner is a type of bricolage, comprising various colloquial legends from literature and folklore, such as the Old Navigator, Cain, and of course the Wandering Jew. To this bricolage I would add Dr. Faustus, for as Chayes points out, the Mariner does resemble the classically Gothic Faustian overreacher (1965:89-92). For Chayes this is evident through a symbolic interpretation of the Mariner's act of shooting the Albatross, thereby relegating it to the material world in an attempted comprehension thereof, and consequently transgressing metaphysical bounds in a way this is akin to the transgressions of Dr. Faustus. I did, however, indicate that I do not agree with such an interpretation, and I have suggested that it is rather the Mariner's attempted comprehension of supernatural forces through the Understanding that leads to superstition and apostasy. Subsequently, I contend that in so far as the Mariner is an archetypal Faustian overreacher, his Understanding is the means through which he summons his Mephistopheles – his Mephistopheles, in lieu of a demon, being superstition – the result of which is apostasy (the Original Sin), which sees the Mariner's finite Will detached from the Divine centre of creation; all of this translating into, not the loss of his soul as with Dr. Faustus, but spiritual death (a life of sin).

What remains for us to consider is whether the Mariner is a Gothic villain or a hero, a subject which has generated much debate. Bostetter contends that “the eternally alienated Mariner alienat[es] [...] the Wedding Guest, for the Guest is robbed of his happiness and the spontaneous participation in the marriage feast (which is really the ‘one life’) and is thereby forced to share the disillusioned wisdom and guilt of the Mariner” (1962:247). Bostetter goes on to state that:

Most of us find, I think, a curious satisfaction in having this cosmos so vividly reaffirmed; it allows us to indulge our superstitious fears quite shamelessly. We enjoy having the fear of God thrown into such thoughtless, happy souls as the wedding-guest.

(Ibid., 253)

It is evident that for Bostetter, the Mariner is a villain who alleviates his own alienation by alienating innocent people through the telling of his hypnotic tale. Moreover, Bostetter boldly proclaims that “we” take almost sadistic satisfaction in having been granted the opportunity to voyeuristically observe the frightening disillusionment of ignorantly blissful characters such as the Wedding-Guest, an instance which Williams (1995) identifies as being characteristic of her Male Gothic. Scholars such as Twitchel (1977) would have it that the Mariner is a villain, a vampire who magically or hypnotically stuns his victims with his gaze, relieves himself by encumbering them with his awful tale, and in doing so drains them of their life force; he thus transfers the pain implicit in the classic vampiric existence into others.<sup>30</sup> However, scholars aligning themselves with the Warren/ Beer tradition of interpreting the poem as a classic tale of fall, penance and redemption would doubtlessly disagree with the assumption that the Mariner is an antagonist who preys on the innocent in accord with some self-centred search for relief; for how can a redeemed individual perpetuate the sins for which he has fallen, for which he has repented and from which he has been redeemed?

From this fissure in the critical tradition surrounding “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, I would argue (informed by the discussion surrounding the influence of the Wandering Jew in the creation of the Mariner) that the Mariner, rather than resembling the typical Gothic hero or villain, more closely resembles the orthodox hero/villain of Gothic literature; also, and equally importantly, the Mariner acts as a foil to the Wedding-Guest. Here Williams’ work on the gendered Gothic is valuable, as the differentiation between her Male and Female Gothic often hinges on characters’ effects on one another, the setting, and whether these are favourable or unfavourable, advantageous or malign. Thus Williams’ notion of the gendered Gothic presents itself as a lens with which to inspect the questions as to the Mariner’s status as villain or hero, not only in the context of his relation with other characters, but also in the contexts of setting and the Gothic tradition. Consequent considerations as to the Mariner’s status as “good” or “bad” therefore

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<sup>30</sup> An argument closely related to, and sometimes informed by discussions of Geraldine in “Christabel”.

warrant a fairly detailed examination of the most important (in this context at least) aspects of the lines along which Williams differentiates between the two parts of her gendered Gothic.

Williams informs us that while the “horror Gothic” was a popular mode for male authors, the “terror Gothic” was preferred by their female counterparts.<sup>31</sup> According to Williams, the Male Gothic differs from the Female formula “in narrative technique, in its assumptions about the supernatural and in plot” (1995:102). The Male Gothic derives its most powerful effects through dramatic irony that comes to fruition through multiple points of view, whereas the Female formula generates suspense “through the limitations imposed by the chosen point of view” (ibid.); in other words, the reader shares the heroine’s often mistaken perceptions and ignorance, as in the typical Radcliffian model. The second point of divergence between the Male and Female Gothic as identified by Williams is that the Female Gothic tends to reveal the natural basis of the supposedly supernatural, where the Male formula accepts the supernatural as part of reality (1995:103). Williams (as shown earlier) also proffers that the Male Gothic has a tragic plot, as seen in *The Monk*, whereas the Female Gothic “demands a happy ending, the conventional marriage of Western comedy”; this is a marriage which implies a marriage between mind and nature but which, in the Female Gothic, also implies a marriage to culture. Whereas the female protagonist lives, marries and presumably prospers, the Male Gothic protagonist fails and dies. Williams describes the typical Male protagonist/villain of the Male Gothic as an “isolated overreacher punished for his hubris, his violation of the Law. He destroys himself, whether in losing his kingdom, like Manfred of Otranto, or his life, like Lewis’ Monk, Ambrosio” (1995:103-104). Conversely, the Female Gothic counterpart experiences rebirth, is awakened to a reality in which love is not only attainable but available. Williams goes on to state that the Female Gothic heroine is often almost literally reborn, “rescued at the climax from the life threatening danger of being locked up, walled in, or otherwise made to disappear from the world” (1995:104). A further difference identified by Williams between the Female and the Male Gothic novel is that whereas the Female Gothic ends in the certainty of marriage, the Male Gothic tends to have an uncertain narrative closure. The Female Gothic is organized around terror, around imagined threats and the process by which the threat is dispelled, whereas the Male Gothic specializes in horror, the half decomposed, maggot ridden corpse, blood-and-guts death and other types of gore (Williams, 1995:102-107). Further narrative conventions characteristic of the Male Gothic identified by Williams include the Male Gothic’s tendency to focus on female suffering, where the readers are positioned as voyeurs who, though sympathetic, “may take pleasure in female victimization”,

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<sup>31</sup> The distinction between horror and terror Gothic has at its roots in a famous differentiation made by Radcliffe herself. For Radcliffe, as propounded in her 1826 essay, *On the Supernatural in Poetry*, “[t]error 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. I apprehend, that neither Shakespeare nor Milton by their fictions, nor Mr. Burke by his reasoning, anywhere looked to positive horror as a source of the sublime, though they all agree that terror is a very high one” (Hodson, 2016:289).

making such instances, which are “intimately related to [the readers’] delight in sexual frankness and perversity”, almost pornographic (1995:104). This female victimization is predominantly represented in the form of threatened female virtue, virtue which is the product of a patriarchal standard and which is usually deemed as a woman’s “most valuable asset”. Regarding the female heroine in the Male Gothic, Williams states that “the Male Gothic heroine is [...] caught in the ideology of a culture that reifies her ‘female nature’ as curious, inconstant, disobedient, weak, and that places her in a situation where those qualities will lead her into danger” (1995:105). As a whole Williams finds that the gory physical materiality of the Male Gothic “expresses the ‘abject’, the otherness of the *mater*/mother who threatens to swallow or engulf the speaking subject”, that the Male Gothic is a “dark mirror” which reflects patriarchy’s nightmare, “recalling a perilous, violent, and early separation from the mother/*mater* denigrated as female” (ibid.). The Female Gothic, on the contrary, “creates a Looking-Glass World where ancient assumptions about the ‘male’ and ‘female’, the ‘Line of Good’ and the ‘Line of Evil’, are suspended or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing perils lurking in the father’s corridors of power” (1995:106-107). Williams elaborates on a great many other characteristics of the Male and Female Gothic, but for the sake of brevity such characteristics will be summarily included in the discussion of the Mariner’s status as good or malign, which is to follow.

At the beginning of this chapter it was proposed that the Mariner is an apostle-like character who is divinely inspired to tell his tale as a type of evangel to individuals he immediately identifies as those who must hear his tale, the means of identifying these individuals being mysterious to the Mariner (hence my usage of “divinely inspired”). This would suggest that the Mariner is not an antagonist, seeing as he a messenger of God’s good news – His evangel or gospel. Such an assumption would be correct to a degree, and also justifies the following discussion, in which Williams’ gendered Gothic will be utilised to a great extent. Thereafter I shall deliberate as to why the Mariner cannot be regarded as either solely good or malign.

Identifying and/or calibrating the goodness or malignity of the Mariner would automatically infer an investigation into his actions towards, and relationship with, other characters, such as the Wedding-Guest, the Hermit, the crew and even the Albatross, as well as the setting. While I may argue that the Mariner is an apostle-like character, the fact remains, as I have pointed out earlier, that the moral he adds to his tale contributes to one of the many misperceptions he perpetrates. As previously discussed, although the Mariner is cognisant of the fact that he has sinned, he cannot identify the exact nature of his sin and therefore relegates it to the killing of the Albatross, an identification which seems to fit perfectly into the notion that God loves all His creatures, and that should one commit a crime against them, one commits a crime against God. I have illustrated how the Mariner apostatises through a process which sees him relying on the Understanding in

his attempted comprehension of things unquantifiable and immaterial; I reiterate that this is a process leading to superstitious belief, of which apostasy (the Original Sin) is the product.

As mentioned previously, for Williams the Male Gothic hero and/or villain is very often characterized as an “isolated overreacher punished for his hubris [and/or] his violation of the Law. He destroys himself, whether in losing his kingdom, like Manfred of Otranto, or his life, like Lewis’ Monk Ambrosio” (1995:103-104). Ensuing from the theological interpretation of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” propounded above, Williams’ characterisation of the typical Male Gothic villain, it would seem, is very much applicable to the Mariner. Did he not overreach himself, and in doing so violate the Law, as a consequence of which he “destroyed” himself as an agent of free will, and was doomed to wander the earth, relating his tale to those he must, enduring unbearable pain until his tale had been told? And so, bearing in mind the summation of some of Williams’ characteristics of the Male and Female counterparts of the gendered Gothic, the reader may have descried that elements of the Male Gothic are applicable to the poem as a whole, and specifically the Mariner. Therefore one may assert, as Bostetter does, that the Wedding-Guest assumes the role of victim, which as Williams argues is a typically female role, where the reader “may take pleasure in female victimization” and where female nature is reified as “curious, inconstant, disobedient, weak, and that [it] places her in a situation where those qualities will lead her into danger” (1995:104-105). One may go further, and state that the acceptance of the supernatural as part of reality would also closely align the poem with the Male Gothic; so too the gory death and reanimation of the crew, as well as the ghastly and horrendous appearance of the Spectre-Bark and, especially, Death. There are many more instances where “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” conforms to the conventions of the Male Gothic, and conclude that the poem is therefore indeed an example of Williams’ Male Gothic.

Yet I would propose that such a reading of the poem would be, though it rings true for many instances in the poem, very narrow, and unaccommodating of the theological principles proffered above. Is it not so that the Male Gothic seeks to reify patriarchal laws by illustrating the consequences of a transgression of these laws? The answer to such a question, though being reductive, would be yes. This would again seem to align the Mariner and the poem to the Male Gothic, but if it is kept in mind that patriarchal law (historically speaking) as it figures in the poem is a consequence of Catholic theology, it becomes apparent that the poem, especially with regard to the relationship between the Mariner and the Wedding-Guest, more closely aligns with what Williams refers to as the Female Gothic’s propensity to create a “Looking-Glass World” (1995:107). As shown in the above summary of Williams’ work, in this “Looking-Glass World [...] the ‘Line of Good’ and the ‘Line of Evil’, are suspended or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing perils lurking in the father’s corridors of power” (1995:107).

I believe that one may concede that the Wedding-Guest is Catholic, bearing in mind his exclamation at l. 79 – “God save thee, ancient Mariner!” – and the fact that the events in the poem take place during the sixteenth century, when Protestant reform, especially in Britain, was still in its infancy (McGann, 1981:50). This would mean that an exposition of the “perils lurking in the father’s corridors of power” (Williams, 1995:107) characteristic of the Female Gothic would translate into the notion that the patriarchy’s “corridors of power” will be closely associated with the Catholic faith and church, and more broadly with Christian faith. Herein lies the crux of the theological principles proffered in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”.

Because (as I reiterate once more) for Coleridge apostasy entails the guidance of a finite Will not by Reason but by the Understanding, this, and not the shooting of the Albatross, is the true crime the Mariner and crew commit. As has also been shown, it is only through the Imagination that the Understanding can be elevated into the realm of Reason. This would entail that if a finite Will (an individual) wishes to reconnect to the centre of creation (God), this individual must undergo a process of redemption (the opposite of apostasy). If, then, apostasy is defined as the guidance of a finite Will not by Reason but by the Understanding, and that the Imagination is central in elevating Understanding to the level of Reason, it is to be concluded that for a person to be redeemed this process must take place. As the reader is surely aware, no adequate definitions of what Reason and the Imagination may have meant for Coleridge have thus far been provided. The following conclusion to this chapter will make good this deficit.

In Chapter XIII of the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge famously argues that:

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, co-existing 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 essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

(2004:74)

From Barfield we learn that Coleridgean Reason operates in two different modes:

In one mode reason is, positively, the act of self-consciousness; it is “conscious self-knowledge”; it is the I AM. In the other mode, it is present only negatively, or un-self-consciously, to the understanding. In both modes it is superindividual, so acting as to individualise.

(1971:109)

Barfield goes on to state that the “moonlight” of negative Reason prompts “the mind’s eye” to shift in the direction of “the positive sunshine” (positive Reason), of which negative Reason is “the pale and dead reflection” (1971:111). In so doing we shift from reliance upon *natura naturata* to *natura naturans*; this is, according to Barfield, “to pass from fancy’s business of arranging and re-arranging the ‘products of destruction, the *cadavera rerum*’, to imagination’s business with ‘existence of absolute life’, which is ‘the correlative truth’” (1971:111). In other words:

Swallowed up by the understanding, positive reason becomes the negative reason of logic, which is however still necessary, which is indeed the ground we stand on, which is still reason. *Linked* to it through the imagination, reason retains, or recovers, her manage and mastery as positive reason; and the understanding is then “employed in the service of the pure reason”.

(Ibid., 112)

Also, psychologically, it is Reason which facilitates “the experience of absolute unity”, and conversely it is also Reason which facilitates “the experience of absolute contradiction” (ibid.,113). Barfield extends such an interpretation by arguing that for Coleridge “God is the ground of the unity between God and man, but also of the distinction between them; and that this distinction is itself the ground of all other distinctities” (ibid.,113). He also quotes a passage which Coleridge wrote on an 1818 copy of *The Friend*, in which he states that “[i]t is wonderful, how closely Reason and Imagination are connected, and Religion the union of the two” (ibid.,112). In these definitions and the relations between them, I believe, lies the secret to understanding the complex and convoluted notion of the redemption of the Mariner, the redemption of the Wedding-Guest, and indeed the Mariner’s role as foil to the Wedding-Guest as the actual protagonist.

The Mariner, though his terrible voyage is over, is not free of his reliance on the Understanding. Had his Understanding been delivered to positive Reason through his Imagination he would be able to comprehend his sin, to repent, and be redeemed. His perpetual reliance on the Understanding leads to a continuance of his misperceptions and therefore superstition and apostasy. He therefore cannot re-attach himself to the Divine centre of creation. In *Aids to Reflection* Coleridge argues that:

The essential faith is not to be found in the understanding or the speculative theory, but "the life, the substance, the hope, the love – in one word, the faith – these are derivatives from the practical, moral, and spiritual nature and being of man". Speculative systems of theology indeed have often had little connection with the essential spirit of religion, and are usually little more than schemes resulting from the strivings of the finite understanding to comprehend and exhibit under its own forms and conditions a mode of being and spiritual truths essentially diverse from their proper objects, and with which they are incommensurate.

(1884:19)

Accordingly, an identification of the Mariner as a follower of “speculative systems of theology” to whom the “proper objects” of “the essential faith” remain “incommensurate” seems most evident. He is therefore not redeemed from his sin of apostasy, but his reliance on the Understanding guides him to add the famous moral to the poem, which leaves the Wedding-Guest sadder and wiser. This is where the role of the Mariner as foil to the Wedding-Guest becomes apparent, along with the confirmation of his status as apostle.

William Wordsworth’s famous critique against Coleridge’s *magnum opus* is:

that the principal person has no distinct character, either in his profession of Mariner, or as a human being who having been long under the control of supernatural impressions might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural; secondly, that he does not act, but is continually acted upon: thirdly, that the events having no necessary connection do not produce each other; and lastly, that the imagery is somewhat too laboriously accumulated.

(in Twitchell, 1977:36)

What is important in this excerpt is that Wordsworth argues that the Mariner has no distinct character and that he is acted upon rather than acting. Wordsworth’s conviction that the Mariner does not act but is rather acted upon is debatable, as most of the poem sees the Mariner relating his narrative to the Wedding-Guest, whom he has virtually entranced. But Wordsworth’s critique is not wholly without point, as it is apparent that if one should tally the instances which see the Mariner acting as opposed to instances where he is acted upon, the latter would far outweigh the former. In fact, during his harrowing journey the Mariner very much reminds us of Barfield’s elucidations on Coleridge’s *Hints towards the Formation of a more Comprehensive Theory of Life* (1818), specifically what is said about insects (1971:55). When outlining Coleridge’s stages of life, Barfield, differentiating between the lower and higher forms, states that “[t]he insect’s organ almost mechanically reproduces the external stimulus. The soul reproduces and retains, in the form of after-images, the impressions that come to it through the senses” (ibid.). The affinity between the reactions of the Mariner and the insect to external stimuli is most apparent. So it is perceptible that during his journey, the Mariner, save for the instance in which he kills the Albatross, merely reacts to external stimuli as Coleridge’s insect would. Prod an insect’s antennae and it may react by moving away from the direction of the prod; convict the Mariner as being responsible for the dire situation in which the crew find themselves and he will reproduce that stimulus by convicting and castigating himself. One may conjecture that the tendency of the insect is an instinctual one, and by such argument say that the universal human propensity to rely upon the Understanding and negative Reason is just as instinctual, a residual effect and condition of our status as fallen beings. However, liberating the individual Will from its reliance on the Understanding through the Imagination and bringing it to the realm of Reason may affect a change: from apostasy and its detachment from God to a re-attachment and consequent

redemption. So the true curse of the Mariner is his continued reliance on the Understanding, as a consequence of which he has lost nearly all agency. He has no choice other than to tell his tale to persons revealed to him as those who need to hear it. This, as I have argued, is, in the poem's reality, by divine design and this is why the Mariner is an apostle-like foil; this is the instruction with which Coleridge imbues this Gothic poem.

Previously illustrated in this chapter are the characteristics the Mariner shares with many biblical prophets and archetypal Gothic characters. It has been shown how the Mariner relies on the Understanding, seeing as he cannot access positive Reason, and herein lies his and "Adam's curse". The Mariner cannot access the Coleridgean primary Imagination, "the living power and prime agent of all human perception [and] a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (Coleridge, 2004:74). Therefore he has no "conscious self-consciousness" or "conscious self-knowledge", he only knows what has happened to him and has attached an ill-matched moral to it.<sup>32</sup> This moral, in terms of Judeo-Christian theology (and from a general point of view), is valid, but it is not really applicable to the Mariner's tale. Its obvious validity is, to my mind, what makes it an attractive one for the Mariner, who is so reliant on the Understanding (an ordering faculty dependent on rules). It enables him to situate his ordeal within the realm of generally accepted Christian truths, and in doing so helps alleviate his perpetual sense of ontological crisis; in the process, though, it ironically becomes another "Albatross" because of his reliance on the Understanding, though this "Albatross" comprises one of the fundamental teachings of Christianity. This fact illustrates the same fostering of superstition Coleridge accused the Catholic church of, ironically drawing on, through Fancy and Understanding, the very cornerstones of the faith, meant to offer a means to redemption. They become, rather, promoters of superstition and therefore apostasy and, as a consequence, of disassociation from God.

Confronted with the telling of this tale, the Wedding-Guest is left "sadder" and "wiser". It is my conviction that the Wedding-Guest, unlike the Mariner, has the means to access the primary Imagination, and therefore Reason. This means lies latent within him and is only made available after the Mariner's narrative. Confronted with the tale of the Mariner's apostasy, the Wedding-Guest, I believe, becomes cognisant of the Mariner's folly and many misperceptions. As a consequence, he is left sadder out of sympathy for the Mariner and wiser in that he, through the theological principles conveyed through the Mariner's narrative, becomes re-attached to God and experiences what Coleridge calls "the essential faith". It has already been indicated that there is evidence that the Wedding-Guest is Catholic; therefore one can speculate that the effect of the tale upon his world-view and faith would indeed leave him sadder and wiser. As a result the

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<sup>32</sup> Which is, of course, "He prayeth best, who loveth best/ All things both great and small" (ll. 612-613 of the 1817 version).

Wedding-Guest becomes “consciously self-conscious” of his status as a finite will, being one who is able to repeat “in the finite mind ... the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (Coleridge, 2004:74), and therefore comprehend existence and nature as *totus in omni parte*. In his chapter on the Coleridgean relationship between God and Man, Barfield conjectures that:

the alternative to *retention* of attachment is its *reproduction*. But reproduction of attachment to the original source of life, following on the loss of it, is, for a created individuality, regeneration by redemption. If there is to be that fresh beginning, which the reproduction of attachment alone enables (for *final* detachment from *any* originating centre of life can only be allowed by death), the totality of the original source must penetrate the detached (and therefore individual) soul and establish a fresh centre within it. There must be an “incarnation” of the divine ground of all being within the human being. “Man fell as a soul to rise as a spirit”. So much is evident to faith – which is fidelity to “one’s own being”, where the roots of conscience and of consciousness are intertwined.

(1971:155)

So it is conceivable that the “totality of the original source [God] penetrate[s] the detached (and therefore individual) soul [the Wedding-Guest’s] and establish[es] a fresh centre within it”, and that the Mariner’s tale and the theological principles therein, are the catalyst for such a process. It is thus that the Mariner is a foil character to the Wedding-Guest, each stands in stark contrast to the other; but it is the Mariner who affects great change in the Wedding-Guest. If the Wedding-Guest is one of the few who has access to the Primary Imagination and therefore Reason, this, I contend, is why specific individuals are “chosen” *ab extra* by the Mariner. These individuals all possess the ability to follow a superstition-free, reasonable Christian theology which sees created but separate individual souls re-attach themselves to the centre of creation. The fact that the Mariner states that the Wedding-Guest will be left sadder and wiser after the telling of his tale, suggests that the Mariner has told his tale innumerable times and that he has seen the consequences thereof in innumerable other individuals.<sup>33</sup> This state can hardly be effected by the general moral the Mariner imposes upon his narrative, but rather by the theological principles I have here proposed.

Earlier in this chapter it was shown that McQueen (2014) draws parallels between the wind as representative of the Holy Spirit as it figures in the Bible, and its appearance in the poem. At the end of the poem, for example, just prior to his return to his native country, the Mariner relates how

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<sup>33</sup> ll. 366-369, 1798 version.

a soft soothing breeze blew on him alone (ll. 456-463, 1834 version).<sup>34</sup> This, drawing from McQueen's identification of the wind as the Holy Spirit, illustrates that the Mariner, like the disciples in Acts 3-5, is imbued with the words and teachings of God and that he is to spread it to those who would comprehend it as such, thus heralding an end to the superstitious brand of Catholic Christianity of the sixteenth century by ushering in a new theology informed by and only attainable through Reason. This is, in a sense, an apocalyptic moment, which sees the cessation of the old, twisted theology which is informed by Understanding, in favour of the divinely inspired new theology, an idea evident in the reference to "the steady weathercock", seen upon the Mariner's return, which is perhaps imagistically linked to the apocalyptic cockcrow and the denial of Peter of the New Testament. This detail is symptomatic of Coleridge's admiration of the New Testament, which allows for a "passing into new mind" entirely compatible with the transformation of the Wedding-Guest in Coleridge's poem (Harding, 2012:511).

In sum, it is my conviction that Coleridge utilises the Gothic in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as a means with which to instruct the general populace on Coleridgean theology. Its use also informs a warning of the consequences of reliance upon the Understanding alone. The poem is therefore, as Coleridge wrote to Mrs. Barbault, quite literally an *exercise* of the imagination for him and, more specifically, his readers. With such a project the Gothic affords Coleridge a broad spectrum of archetypal characters from which to draw, whilst also affording him the opportunity to transgress the norms of the genre and thereby say much more by using much less. Coleridge imbues this Gothic poem with theological principles in the same manner as Midrashic texts (as he had noted) were thus imbued. As shown previously, Harding illustrates that what is most apparent from Coleridge's public utterances on classical and biblical literature is "the power of narrative, including mythic narrative, to raise human communities to a higher sense of their responsibilities: in short, the power of certain myths to function as what Coleridge named 'philosophemes'" (2012:509).<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, with "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" Coleridge creates a Gothic, mythic narrative; a philosopheme used to "raise human communities to a higher sense of their responsibilities"; in other words, a philosopheme the genre of which ensures wide readership and therefore wide instruction. The reasons as to why Coleridge chose the Gothic as a genre with which to create such a philosopheme are numerous, but can only be understood and appreciated when viewed against his other Gothic works such as "Christabel". These will be

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<sup>34</sup> An instance which curiously mirrors the divine breeze which blows over and indeed affects everything in "The Eolian Harp". Here, however, the breeze only blows on the Mariner, which, drawing from the example of the wind in the "Eolian Harp", would suggest that in a world of detached and therefore apostatised individuals, it is only on the prophet-like Mariner that the breeze blows, consequently affecting in the Mariner a denial of free will associated with his tale. This is an instance which curiously mimics the Aeolian harp's chiming not on its own accord, but through the external will of the wind. So too the Mariner is "chimed" to tell his tale and thereby save his audience from reliance upon the Understanding and superstition, and deliver them to Reason and the true faith.

<sup>35</sup> We remember that "philosophemes" are principles of reasoning.

considered in the conclusion of this dissertation. For now, however, it suffices to have identified the theological principles with which Coleridge hopes to instruct his readership, as well as to have shown how he uses the Gothic as a genre in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner".

## Chapter Three

### “Christabel” as Instructive Gothic Allegory

Coleridge's unfinished ballad “Christabel” may perhaps be his longest sustained work of standard late eighteenth- to early nineteenth century Gothic literature, and as such it has received a great deal of attention from scholars and critics alike. The first part of the ballad was written in 1797 and the second in 1800, after the poet's return from Germany. The poem, though circulated in manuscript, was only to be published in 1816 along with “Kubla Khan” and “The Pains of Sleep”. Although the publisher, John Murray, was excited at the prospect of bringing it out, it was harshly received for a number of reasons, which will be discussed shortly. Many scholars have focused on this poem and have approached it from a great many angles, ranging from feminist critique, New Historical approaches, and Gothic approaches; critics have also noted the poem's status as a piece of social criticism, especially pertaining to morality and the imagination. An analysis of “Christabel” as an instructive Gothic poem, therefore implies consideration of not only historic and Coleridgean sources, but also of more modern, contemporary readings of the poem as such (whether the instructive purposes of the poem feature explicitly or implicitly in these readings), thereby viewing the poem, and its possible sources, in the context of the critical heritage it has generated.

Scholars have long contended that Coleridge parodies the Gothic in “Christabel”. One such scholar, Edward Dramin (1982), sustains this belief in his article “Amid the Jagged Shadows: Christabel and the Gothic Tradition”. Dramin maintains that Coleridge, through “sleight-handed” parody, critiques the Gothic's “lower literature” nature, which sees the elevation of the material world above the spiritual and which also exploits “cheap” mechanisms by which to excite the emotions of its readership (1982, 221-222). He indicates that “Christabel” both critiques these Gothic tendencies and also hopes to elevate the Gothic by emphasizing moral universals in the poem (*ibid.*). Accordingly, Dramin believes the parodic critique evident in “Christabel” to be subsidiary to Coleridge's aim to reveal mankind's limited nature in the poem, but that both aspects are interrelated in order to express Coleridge's belief that “the lack of imagination and the sensuality of Gothic writers like Lewis express the contemporary preference for the material at the expense of higher, unseen realities” (*ibid.*, 226).

Jerrold Hogle contends that “Christabel” strives to situate its perceived cultural level above that of the “terrorist school of writing” by reassembling the bricolage of surviving archaic language and turning it into an older, more natural mode of poetic discourse opposed to that of the unnatural modern manufacturers of “tales of terror” like Matthew Lewis (2002:18). Hogle goes on to state that Coleridge inserted reassembled fragments of surviving archaic language into his overtly

Gothic poem so as to link the tale, through its falsely antiquated diction, to works of fiction deemed as “high literature”, such as Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, which is “the supreme English example [of] long-sanctioned conventions of Christian allegory, in which title characters encounter the duplicity of Original Sin in themselves and others by way of preternatural figures soon rendered as loathsome, rather than lingeringly seductive as they are in *The Monk*”. Hogle means that Christabel and Geraldine inform part of a complex dual relationship in which Christabel’s “hidden tendencies gradually emerge in the uncanny Geraldine who seems to mirror back a fiendish anamorphosis onto the title character” (2005:20); that Geraldine and Christabel are in fact extensions of a single self and that the Gothic provides a perfect textual site for such projections because of its generic oxymoronic characteristics which act as a repository for contradictions made safe by the Gothic’s blatant fictionality. Hogle thus concludes that the poem could not have been finished with any sense of resolution because of its Gothic abjections, which also announce the very instabilities they contain within them, on women and other subjects. Richard Berkeley (2014) echoes Hogle’s view in that he agrees that Geraldine allows Christabel to know more of herself (not necessarily her “good” self) in a preternaturally seductive manner which sees both the realisation and the loss of self. Berkeley concludes (drawing from Christabel’s silence and inability to tell her father of Geraldine’s seduction of her) that the key to Geraldine’s seduction is silence, that it is this silence that accounts for the difficulties Coleridge had in circumscribing the imagination in the *Biographia Literaria* (2014:267). Thus, because “Christabel” was written prior to the *Biographia Literaria*, the poem is not “about” the imagination, but Coleridge’s accounts of the imagination in the *Biographia Literaria* are in fact about solving the problem of the poem – the problem of the seductive imagination. This seduction, Berkeley contends, is also untellable, because Coleridge could not finish the poem nor his views on the imagination in the *Biographia Literaria*, seeing as both are interrupted by, and dissipate into silence.

Karen Swann (1985) admits that the focus of her essay is on the peripheries of the poem. She asserts that Coleridge’s contemporaries (that is, the men of letters) reacted hysterically to “Christabel” because they saw “the fantastic exchanges of Geraldine and Christabel as dramatizing a range of problematically invested literary relations, including those between writers and other writers, and among authors, readers, and books” (1985:398). Swann accordingly argues that by feminizing the problem, critical discourse on “Christabel”

both played out and displaced the excessive charges of these literary relations: it cast impropriety as *generic* impurity, and then identified this impurity with dangerously attractive feminine forms – the licentious body of Geraldine, and more generally, of the poem *Christabel*.

(Ibid.)

The final sections of Swann's essay argue that the feminization of the terms of the debate on "Christabel" repeats a strategy frequently and habitually adopted by high culture when defending its privileges. Accordingly, Swann argues that issues in "Christabel" can be located in Coleridge's writings on a variety of exchanges between readers and representations and that Coleridge's thinking suggests that what is at stake here is "the autonomy of the subject in relation to cultural forms" (ibid., 398-400). Critically, Swann indicates that the conventionality of the critics' hysterical reactions to "Christabel" is accounted for by the poem's overt connections to "low culture" Gothic romances and that its exposure of their frenzied defences accounts for "its exemplary power among Coleridge's poems of the supernatural" (ibid., 399).

All of these arguments hold true in most respects, but it seems that most critics miss one crucial piece of the puzzling phenomenon that is Coleridge's "Christabel". Though it might be true, and evidence abounds, that Coleridge burlesques the Gothic in "Christabel" on some level, while at the same time hoping to elevate it and seriously critique it on another, few of these scholars have considered the poem itself as a multi-levelled, convoluted, equivocal allegory commenting on eighteenth- and nineteenth century anxieties pertaining to literature, history, society, morality, religion, and sexuality. In such a reading, Geraldine is the embodiment of Gothic literature (and the representation of moral evil to an extent) and Christabel is (amongst other things) the reading public, more specifically the female reading public (and the representation of the human condition embattled by evil, yet hoping to retain goodness).

Consequently, the following paragraphs will show that "Christabel" is not solely a parody of the Gothic, nor is it solely an expression of Coleridge's attempt to elevate the Gothic, or merely a poem on Coleridge's thoughts on the imagination and the dangers thereof. I hope to indicate that "Christabel" is a complex allegory, which, again, sees Geraldine as the embodiment of Gothic fiction and Christabel as the embodiment of the contemporary British reading public. I also hope to show that this allegorical poem aims to reveal (amongst other things) the dangers of the Gothic novel to both the public as well as to the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century British literary sphere as a whole. Because Coleridge was one of the Romantic poets most attracted to the Gothic, the findings of such an approach will prove important, as they will show Coleridge's instructive purposes behind this Gothic poem and in doing so elucidate the relationship between British Romanticism and the literary Gothic. In hoping to substantiate these claims I will focus largely on the poem itself, but will also look at Coleridge's other writings, including his literary criticism, letters, the *Biographia Literaria*, notes and other sources. Aspects of eighteenth- and nineteenth century history, including literary, political, socio-economic and other histories, as well as the research of more recent scholars, will also be utilised. In so doing, I hope to place the poem not only in the Gothic tradition, but also to place it in the modern critical heritage the Gothic has

given rise to, so as to come to an understanding of the instruction evident in and generated by the poem and its allegorical nature.

The notion that “Christabel” is allegorical does not have to mean that it cannot be seen as a parody, as a poem on the Coleridgean imagination or as dealing with the concept of Original Sin and the duality thereof. In fact the work of Hogle, Dramin, Berkeley, and Swann, as well as a great many other scholars, seems irrevocably to prove the presence of these notions in “Christabel”. Yet, few of these scholars (although Swann hints towards it) have insistently entertained the idea that “Christabel” works, or may work, allegorically so as to criticise inclusively the literary, political, social and economic spheres of the time, as well as to indicate the repercussions the then current state of these spheres might have on their own future as well as the morality of mankind. I believe that by attempting to compare the characters in the poem (specifically Christabel and Geraldine) to well-known Gothic characters and Gothic works of fiction, insight into their proposed status as the embodiment of certain notions and institutions (be they literary, social, political or otherwise) may be gained. This will make the idea of “Christabel” as an allegorical, and, crucially, an instructive work of poetry, more attractive. In hoping to prove such claims a discussion of how the setting in “Christabel” compares to that of the typical Gothic work of fiction is essential.

The opening lines of “Christabel” see the speaker conjuring up an unashamedly Gothic setting. The first line of this Gothic vignette spectacularly conforms to Gothic conventions by immediately introducing the reader to a clichéd Gothic milieu (echoing that of Lewis and Radcliffe): the castle clock of a rich baron indicating midnight amid the hooting of owls and a mastiff bitch (who can supposedly see the ghost of Christabel’s mother) giving answer to the ringing of the bell. There is, however, one instance, in the first stanza, which sees the conventionality of this Gothic cacophony interrupted. The cock, having been awakened by the incessant hooting of the owls, gives answer with his own avian cry. This almost contra-generic interruption of the Gothic setting not only draws the attention of the reader through its unconventionality, but also does so through its ancient symbolic and theological connotations (more specifically those pertaining to the apocalypse and the crucifixion of Jesus). This, however, is a point returned to later in this discussion of “Christabel”. For now it suffices to say that from the outset this poem confesses its overt Gothicism whilst concomitantly announcing its wishes to break away from the norms of the Gothic school of writing. However, the setting, both inside and outside the castle walls, conforms to established Gothic scenery and very much reminds one of the “ingredients” for a Gothic work of fiction Coleridge himself identified and which has been alluded to in the previous chapter (and is to be discussed below). Despite this conventionality in terms of Gothic trappings, the second stanza sees the speaker entering parodically into what might be called a short dialogue with the literary conventions of the Gothic school.

Edward Dramin informs us that the question with which the second stanza begins, following the overtly Gothic vignette in the first, shatters any thoughts that might point to the poem's being straightforwardly Gothic (1982:222). According to Dramin the "question-answer sequence juxtaposes the typical Gothic setting (evoked by the question) against Coleridge's original scene (provided by the answer)" (ibid.). Consequently, the conventionality of the setting evoked in the vignette is de-emphasised, which implies that a conventional or standard Gothic tale is not forthcoming. Dramin goes on to argue that this notion, encapsulated in the question-answer sequence in the second stanza pertaining to setting, echoes Coleridge's review of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, which appeared in *The Critical Review* in August 1794 (ibid., 222-223). In this review Coleridge laments the scenery of the novel as it has "too much of the sameness: the pine and larch trees wave, and the full moon pours its lustre through almost every chapter" (1794). Thus, according to Dramin, the opening scene of "Christabel" rebukes the Gothic by rebuking the "sameness" of its descriptions. Therefore, Coleridge enters into a dialogue with the Gothic which sees Gothic conventions purposefully adhered to and broken. However, if "Christabel" is to be interpreted as an instructive allegory, an analysis of its characters is imperative if one hopes to gain insight into their allegorical nature and how this in turn infers a pedagogical project undertaken by Coleridge in the poem. This will, as happened in the previous chapter, involve an investigation into the origin (literary and non-literary) of the characters in the poem.

Scholars have long alluded to the name "Christabel" as being a composite of the names Christ and Abel, and have consequently drawn parallels between her story and those of these two biblical characters.<sup>36</sup> Many have subsequently indicated that like Christ and Abel, Christabel, because of her innocent, benevolent and obedient nature, is righteous and that, also like Christ and Abel (Christ being crucified by vengeful people and Abel being killed by a jealous Cain), she suffers under the will and actions of evil when seduced by Geraldine and consequently mistreated by her father. This notion also recalls characteristics of the typical Gothic heroine. Jerrold Hogle likens the scene which sees Christabel and Geraldine sneaking into the castle of Sir Leoline, to a passage in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, where Emily St. Aubert sneaks around in castle Udolpho (2005:19). Hogle goes on to liken Christabel's silence regarding the sight of Geraldine's breast to that of Emily's silence as to the unspeakable horror she spies behind the black veil,

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<sup>36</sup> Tuttle (1938:446) draws from the opinions of E.H. Coleridge and proffers that the name Christabel is derived from Percy's *Reliques*, specifically from "Sir Cauline", which features a female character named "Christabelle". A.H. Nethercot (1939:165-166) mirrors Tuttle's opinion, although Nethercot would have Percy's "Christabelle" spelled "Chrystabelle". Nethercot (1939:166) indicates that Coleridge vacillated between the spellings "Christabel" and "Christobell" for a long time. Such a vacillation and consequent final decision illustrates that Coleridge put great thought into the name and its spelling. Such exertion would therefore imply that Coleridge inscribed specific meaning into the name, rather than merely opting for a suitable name found in Percy's *Reliques*. This would support the notion that her name may be a composite of "Christ" and "Abel" and that the various connotations and inferences made from such a composite would therefore indicate a degree of writerly intent rather than contrived readerly interpretation.

which she must keep secret and which acts as a device for generating excitement in the reader. In the poem it is evident that Christabel's silence and inability to disclose the sight of Geraldine's accursed breast does mirror the suspense-inducing techniques often employed by writers of Gothic prose, but it is not limited to the sole purpose of generating readerly excitement by means of stalling the course of events. This fact will become more apparent as this chapter continues. Although Hogle identifies these stereotypical characteristics of the Gothic heroine in "Christabel", there are a great many more to be espied when viewing Christabel's character against those of some of the most famous Radcliffian Gothic heroines<sup>37</sup> and the female characters created by other female authors of the Gothic.

Ellis reiterates the notion that the "vulgar" entertainment of the Gothic was compatible with female writers and readership (which is confirmed by the publishing market and circulating libraries) and that as such it became the site of heartfelt debates about the nature and politics of femininity (2000:48). Ellis goes on to illustrate that Radcliffe's novels "intimately explore the fears and horrors endemic to the private lives of her readership" (ibid., 50). Also, her fiction structures itself around a discourse on women which aims to regulate women's behaviour "and their representations, by outlining and regulating a model of feminine virtue and propriety" (ibid.). Ellis further points to the ethereal fragility of Radcliffe's heroines (like Adeline and Emily) as recalling the protagonists of the typical sentimental novel, seeing as both are figures of "exquisite proportion" who have "attractive melting eyes and a form which had the airy lightness of a nymph" (ibid., 51). These, let us call them, sentimental qualities of the Radcliffian Gothic novel are evident in Christabel's appearance when she is described as "the lovely lady" (l. 23) with "eyes so blue" (l. 209) who "sheds" "Large tears that leave the lashes bright!" (ll. 303-304). Not only in appearance does Christabel display certain aspects of the archetypal Radcliffian heroine, but also in her very nature. Seeing as she is chaste, religious, humble, innocent and modest, Christabel initially has the sentimentally validated qualities of a Gothic heroine. Her familial background also mimics that of the Radcliffian heroine. Early in the poem we learn of the death of Christabel's mother, a bereavement she shares with Adeline especially (whose mother died when she was eleven) as well as with Emily (whose mother dies early on in the novel, and, crucially, before Monsieur St. Aubert). The death of their mothers also implies a paternal upbringing which Christabel shares particularly with Adeline. Unlike Adeline's father, however, Christabel's father is initially, it would seem (before the arrival of Geraldine), benevolent towards his daughter, as indicated early on in the poem in ll. 24-25, where the speaker characterizes Christabel as "The lovely lady, Christabel/ Whom her father loves so well". Though Sir Leoline initially loves his daughter, Christabel is treated severely by her father (as is Adeline by hers), although in

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<sup>37</sup> Christabel's character and familial circumstances are especially reminiscent of Adeline's in *Romance in the Forrest*, and Emily's in the *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

Christabel's case this would seem to happen only after Leoline is duped by Geraldine and her account of her supposed familial connections to Lord Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine. The severity of Sir Leoline's treatment of Christabel mirrors the paternal severity and/or abandonment found in Radcliffe's *The Romance of the Forrest* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.<sup>38</sup>

From this perspective it is evident that Coleridge consciously copies in Christabel characteristics common to Radcliffian heroines on various levels. One of the levels on which I have touched is the nature of Christabel, which reflects those of Emily St. Aubert and Adeline, whose natures have their origin in the sentimental literature of the middle to late eighteenth century, which sought to advise and instruct young ladies on the matter of conduct in the hopes of reproducing the desired female attributes they advocated. Ellis indicates that sentimental prose (often in the form of books of conduct) enjoyed great popularity in the late eighteenth century and was specifically aimed at young women of the middle station (2000:54). According to Ellis these books, like Sarah Pennington's *An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Daughters* (1761) and Hestor Chapone's *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* (1773), educated its audience by offering a model of feminine behaviour "proper" for a young lady. This "proper" behaviour consciously differs from aristocratic conduct, because of its ostentation, as well as plebeian nature, on the basis of its being considered vulgar and somewhat coarse (Ellis, 2000:54). This new circumscription of appropriate womanly conduct was dependent on (and a consequence of) the widespread change this period saw in "all spheres of life, commercial or social, public or private" (ibid.). According to Ellis, sentimental moral theorists, such as Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, projected the idea that society ought to be based on mutual love and benevolence, while promoting a heightened sensitivity to "the social and moral problems of economic change". However, as Ellis goes on to illustrate, Radcliffe's novels lay bare the contradictions of the type of sensibility advocated in tales of sentiment (ibid. 54-55). In the case of Emily St. Aubert, Radcliffe illustrates the limits of sensibility by indicating that Emily's sensibility allows her to function wonderfully in a benevolent domestic setting, but when she is removed from it, this self-same sensibility restricts her actions and leaves her defenceless against male predators, prompting the need for rescue by other male characters such as Valancourt and Monsieur Du Pont. Critically, Radcliffe's heroines' perceived beauty and propriety (which attract their rescuers and the reader) are very much dependent on their sensibility. In Coleridge's poem it is evident that Christabel's orthodox sentimental sensibility emanates from her initial sympathy for Geraldine, which leads to her introducing her (and her father's) seductress into their home. It is also Christabel's innocence and goodness which may be the reason behind her failing to question Geraldine's motives when they lie together in bed prior to Geraldine's apparent seduction. In fact, Geraldine convinces

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<sup>38</sup> The word "patriarchal" in this instance does not solely refer to the fathers of these Radcliffian heroines, but also to villainous men of power such as Montoni.

Christabel to undress so that she may pray. Christabel naively obeys this command and I believe that one of the reasons behind her naive obedience is because prayer is an integral element of the consciousness of a lady of sensibility, and as such it should hold no danger, even if said in the nude in front of a total stranger. Accordingly, Christabel, duped (ironically) by an appeal to a habitual act of worship, undresses and allows herself to be seduced by Geraldine and her spell. Hence, like Radcliffe's heroines, Christabel's beauty as well as her susceptibility are inextricably linked to her sensibility; the very same sensibility inherited by Christabel from the Gothic from the eighteenth century books of conduct in which it was arguably first advocated. Subsequently, as her name suggests, Christabel – like Christ and Abel – suffers because of her inherent innocence and goodness, which are comparable to those of Radcliffian heroines, but which differ in that Christabel is not, like Emily and Adeline, saved at the end of the poem (which might be a result of its unfinished state, in itself suggestive of the poem's problematic nature for its author). Coleridge expressed his problems with this kind of sensibility in 1795 in his *Lecture on the Slave Trade* (in Patton (1970:249)) in which he states:

True Benevolence is a rare Quality among us. Sensibility indeed we have to spare—what novel-reading Lady does not overflow with it to the great annoyance of her Friends and Family—Her own sorrows like the Princes of Hell in Milton's Pandemonium sit enthroned bulky and vast —while the miseries of our fellow creatures dwindle into pigmy forms, and are crowded, an unnumbered multitude, into some dark corner of the heart where the eye of sensibility gleams faintly on them at long Intervals—but a keen feeling of trifling misfortunes is selfish cowardice not virtue.

He later revised this passage and clarified his differentiation between “True Benevolence” and “false bastard sensibility”, stating that: “Sensibility is not Benevolence. Nay, by making us tremblingly alive to trifling misfortunes, it frequently prevents it, and induces effeminate and cowardly selfishness” (Patton, 1970:139). Therefore, Coleridge strongly opposed the type of sensibility found in Gothic fiction, and this objection is clearly illustrated in this poem and especially in Christabel's characteristics.

As Christabel seems to be a bricolage of clichéd characteristics of the Gothic heroine she may be deemed an allegorical representative of the typical Gothic heroine. However, it may be further argued that Coleridge would also have Christabel alluding allegorically to the British reading public, more specifically the female members of the British reading public. One may even go so far as to say that she, in conjunction with Leoline, Geraldine, her mother, her knight and Bracy, also alludes to the general literary sphere in which Coleridge found himself. Such an interpretation allows for the initial identification of one level of the complex allegorical traits of this poem, the level which sees Coleridge criticising Gothic literary conventions as well as contemporary literary conventions such as those of sentimental literature.

I have indicated above how Coleridge, with the creation of Christabel, makes a bricolage of the quintessential characteristics of the Gothic heroine (with her pronounced sensibility), specifically those of Radcliffe's heroines. But in Christabel's familial and domiciliary situation I believe Coleridge utilises, in conjunction with the allegorical traits evident in Sir Leoline (to be discussed below), historical allegorical literary practices evident in the works of Spenser – the self-same practices defended and indeed prescribed by Burke, Hurd and Warton, in a defence of the propriety of harkening back to Britain's Gothic past in literature and legislature. As indicated in Chapter One, eighteenth century philosophers, writers and critics such as Edmund Burke re-evaluated the past as the Augustan age waned. Though in a sense politically motivated, this re-evaluation of Britain's Gothic past was also practised by literati in various works, including Thomas Warton's *The Faerie Queene of Spenser* (1762) and Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762). Both Hurd and Warton interpreted supernatural elements in archaic romance as allegories of social realities and therefore argued that older romance was a legitimate form of artistic expression when viewed in context. Hurd and Warton felt that the relative primitivism of Gothic society allowed for a literary realm more conducive to the free play of the imagination, which did not place the same stringent constraints on literature as the preceding Augustan literary period. They acknowledged the loss perpetrated by these constraints and so argued that society must learn from and seek to imitate the uncivilised past, a view which became popular in the latter half of the eighteenth century. It is in this sense that Christabel's role as allegorical representation, not only of the female reading public and Gothic heroines, but also of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century British literature in general, becomes evident, especially when viewed in conjunction with Sir Leoline and his allegorical function.

According to Dramin (1982:227-228), Sir Leoline's qualities are mirrored in Coleridge's attacks on the conservative aristocracy in "Fears of Solitude", "Talleyrand, the Lord of Grenville", "Religious Musings" and "Destiny of Nations". Dramin's argument is substantiated by a passage written by Coleridge in the 6 March 1796 issue of *The Watchman*. Dramin summarizes this passage as follows:

Sir Leoline's callousness and love of violence appear in Coleridge's descriptions of the nobility in *The Watchman* [...] [when] Coleridge criticises Pitt's successor, the conservative Prime Minister Addington, for his love of "parade and specious appearance" and his shallow "homage to eloquence". The "pompous and shewy" Addington has an "air of openness and candour" and "an imposing manner". "Easily thrown into confusion" and lacking "strong discriminating power" of mind, Addington's intellect is "too short-sighted to see beyond the point immediately in front of him".

(Dramin, 1982: 227-228)

It is with little effort that one may descry the similarities between Sir Leoline's qualities and those criticised in Coleridge's view of the aristocracy. Indeed, Coleridge appropriates the very Gothic convention, alluded to by Warton and Hurd in their works on archaic English literature, of having a castle represent the seat of seemingly totalitarian power which does not necessarily benefit its people. The notion that the figure of Sir Leoline refers allegorically to the aristocracy is also inscribed in his name,<sup>39</sup> which can be read as comprising "leo" and "line", meaning "lineage of the lion". Since the lion has been a symbol of British aristocracy, heraldry and rule for many hundreds of years, one may conjecture that Coleridge projects his critical view on the aristocracy through the character of Sir Leoline. Sir Leoline being sick and old, however, might point towards an even harsher critique of the ruling class. Consequently, Leoline's threats of violence against Geraldine's kidnappers might seem less than feasible, hinting at the fact that his seat of power is fictional; its only reality lying in the reader's and other characters' belief in it. In the poem, more specifically the second part of the poem, the reader is confronted with many geographic references, specifically references to the Lake District. Yet, there is no castle named Langdale Hall to be found in the Lake District, a fact which supports the notion that Leoline's seat of power, his castle, is just as fictional as the supposed seats of power held by some shallow and pompous members of the British aristocracy and upper class. Accordingly, one may concede that Coleridge wishes to indicate that the contemporary ruling class's power is waning and that they are too inept to see the real problems of their people, as well as the fact that the people should no longer be subject to the archaic institution of the ruling class of feudal times. Sir Leoline's susceptibility to Geraldine's seduction through the relation of her family background reflects therefore the British susceptibility to be duped by counterfeits of the archaic, which initially gained support in political debates and writings like those of Burke, and which, according to Clery, sought to justify the British form of parliament through a reactionary revision of accounts of mediaeval culture as well as a disavowal and general antagonising of Catholicism and its classical connections (2006:25). Sir Leoline's clearly fictional, Gothic nature might be Coleridge's means of protecting himself from any legal repercussions; this strategy in itself is a very Gothic literary convention, which has its roots in the allegorical functions employed by Spenser, as identified by Hurd and Warton.

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<sup>39</sup> A.H. Nethercot (1939:170-174) argues that Coleridge obtained the name "Leoline", and the names of other characters, from Hutchinson's *History of Cumberland*. Nethercot goes on to illustrate that Leoline, though it may seem a fabricated name because of its relative scarcity outside the Coleridgean context, is in fact a name that was not uncommon among the British aristocracy (1939:173). He also illustrates that "Leoline" is a Latinism derived from the original "Lewellin", "Llewellen" which are in turn Anglicised versions of the original Welsh "Llywelyn". Opinions are divided as to the exact origin of the "Llywelyn". Some mean that it is from "Lugubelinos" which is a compound of the names of two Celtic gods (Anon, 2015). Others are convinced that the name "Llewellen" means, as I have shown above with regard to "Leoline", "lineage of the lion", while others argue that the name means "in the image of the leader" (Anon, 2015). What is important for the purposes of this chapter is to note that the name bears anciently validated power with unique British connotations from the time that would have been deemed Britain's Gothic era.

So in a political sense, it would seem that evidence abounds for the notion that Sir Leoline is in fact a character constructed with the purpose of critiquing institutions of British rule, which, as is especially evident in Coleridge's 1796 Bristol lectures, Coleridge at the time of first composing "Christabel" deemed callous and unfeeling. Indeed, Goh argues that:

The poetics of the gothic, it has been noted by scholars drawing from Bakhtinian theory, constitutes an "interroga[tion] of authoritative truths", a "heteroglossia" whose different parts express "the differentiated socio-ideological position of the author".

(2003:274)

Goh argues furthermore that Coleridge's poetry accomplishes the above "by mounting a sentimental 'effusion' that is at odds with the tyranny of commercial-national ambitions" (ibid.). Whereas Goh and Dramin (1982) would have Sir Leoline referring allegorically to the tyranny of patriarchal commercial-national ambitions, Swann, as indicated at the onset of this chapter, would see the "authoritative truths" most exposed (truths which can be interrogated after such an exposition) with the publication of "Christabel" in 1816, as the hysterical reactions of male critics such as William Hazlitt.

Here it is apt to recall that Swann, in "Literary Gentleman and Lovely Ladies: The Debate on the Character of Christabel" (1985), argues, amongst other things, that "the feminization of the terms of the debate on *Christabel* repeats [...] a strategy habitually adopted by high culture when defending its privileges". Such arguments are echoed by Williams (1995), Mudge (1992) and Berkeley (2014). Williams, when commenting on the reception of Keats by his contemporaries (especially Lord Byron), indicates that not only were such defences gendered, but also very often sexualized. Williams goes on to argue that in defending "high-culture" in such gendered and sexualised terms, eighteenth- and nineteenth century literary critics established a gendered high-low dyad where "high culture" is assumed to play the male role and "low culture" the female (1995:106-108); this is a phenomenon also described by Hogle in his analysis of Keats' "The Eve of St. Agnes" (2003). Crucially, Williams, when differentiating between aspects of the Male and Female Gothic, specifies that:

[The] Male Gothic is a dark mirror reflecting patriarchy's night *mère*, recalling a perilous, violent, and early separation from the mother/*mater* denigrated as "female". "Female Gothic" creates a Looking-Glass World where ancient assumptions about the "male" and the "female", the "Line of Good" and the "Line of Evil", are suspended or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing the perils lurking in the father's corridors of power.

(1995:107)

From the passage quoted above it would seem evident that Coleridge's "Christabel" conforms to, or at least reflects, aspects of both the Male and Female Gothic. For now, however, with the current discussion of the allegorical importance of both Christabel and Sir Leoline in mind, it suffices to mention that this passage exemplifies the importance of gendering to the British Gothic as a genre, an importance which is essential if one is to navigate the various allegorical planes on which "Christabel" moves. Similar to Williams' contention that the Female Gothic exposes "perils lurking in the father's corridors of power", in "Christabel: The Wandering Mother and the Enigma of Form", Swann intimates that Sir Leoline is closely associated with repressive Law and that Leoline's sphere "is the Law – a legislative, symbolic order structured according to a divisive logic" (1984:537, 547). In this interpretation Swann investigates female and patriarchal hysteria from the point of view of the assumption that:

The poem invites us to link the displacing movement of cultural forms through subjects to the "feminine" malady of hysteria and the "feminine" genres of the circulating library; at the same time, it mockingly and dreamily informs us that hysteria is the condition of all subjects in discourse, and that the attribution of this condition to feminine bodies is a conventional, hysterical response.

(1984:535)

Swann relates how a feminine reading of the poem may argue that feminine hysteria (as displayed by Christabel after she has been seduced by Geraldine) is a direct consequence of the patriarchal Law. However, she believes such a reading would exclude other equally valid interpretations as pertain to hysteria. Elaborating on her argument regarding hysteria as it features both outside and inside the context of the poem,<sup>40</sup> Swann offers two possible readings: "[T]hat hysteria produces the Law[...]. Second, that the Law is just one form of hysteria" (1984:549). Swann goes on to elucidate that the Law "resembles hysteria in its defences and effects" and that in so doing leaves the legislator open to recurrences of the very notions against which it defends (1984:550).

Ulmer's reading of the relationship between Sir Leoline and Christabel reifies the notion that Sir Leoline is the representative, or rather the allegorical embodiment of repressive patriarchal Law (2007:376-407). Ulmer contends that:

Coleridge's criticism tends to handle Leoline roughly, of crimes ranging from a stultifying asceticism to outright incest. He plainly seems emotionally authoritarian and life-denying. As his matin-bells custom reveals, Leoline is a religious man who has sought consolation from heaven for the loss of his wife and who has idealised his surviving daughter in similar terms.

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<sup>40</sup> In this context "outside" refers to the often hysterical responses by late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century British literary critics as well as research published on the subject of hysteria, such as Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, during the same time frame.

Sir Leoline's idealization of and possessiveness towards Christabel further effect his infantilization of her, "encouraging her to remain [...] the little girl he wants her to be" (ibid., 389).

From the above it becomes evident that Sir Leoline can be interpreted not only as allegorical representation of the faults and tyranny of the governing aristocracy, as Dramin argues. The representatives of the masculine literary "high-culture" (for example, reviewers for publications such as *Blackwood's*) would defend its privileges against what is deemed low, feminine and vulgar using gendered and sexualised terms. It is this critical tendency which serves as a background to Coleridge's creation of Sir Leoline and Christabel (both separated from the only motherly figure to be featured in the poem). He would have them allegorically dramatize the difficult and convoluted relationship and exchanges between what was at the time deemed masculine "high" literature (Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Percy etc.) and its defenders, and base, feminine and vulgar Gothic Romance and its defenders (and almost more importantly, the countless producers thereof).

Just as the reviewers of journals such as the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's* enforced patriarchal law on the feminised Gothic genre, so too Leoline enforces his Law on Christabel. The pens, power and influence of the reviewers, so sharply felt by Coleridge after the 1816 publication of "Christabel",<sup>41</sup> are the equivalent of the repressive Sir Leoline and his castle, his seat of power. Again, it is appropriate to note that Sir Leoline is aging and weak, the passing of each day and the concomitant ringing of the matin-bells signalling his gradual decline and therefore by implication the declining prescriptive and repressive literary power of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century literary critics like those of *Blackwood's Magazine*.

Despite Christabel's sharing many qualities with the female heroines of sensibility of Gothic prose such as those of Radcliffe, she is not simply an allegorical representation of the Gothic as a genre. Possibly stifled by the bleak prospects of the cold halls and chambers of Langdale Hall, she ventures out to pray for her knight, her knight representing not only her chaste longing for conventional marriage, but also for the unfamiliar. The dreams which make her "moan and leap" (l. 30) are an apt indicator of her desire for the new as well as representatives of her budding sexuality. The Gothic offered the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century British reading public the same attractions. They escaped the well-trodden castle walkways of the poetic fathers and progenitors of their Law to explore a genre which, at the time, promised novelty and in some

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<sup>41</sup> Swann (1985:398-403) indicates how reviewers for publications including the *Edinburgh Review*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, *Scourge* and the *Augustan Review* attacked "Christabel" (and indeed Coleridge himself) as being "unmanly", declaring the poem the licentious and "improper" "ravings" of "an old nurse", "a witch" and "an enchanted virgin". These attacks, as Swann and other scholars have noted, are exemplary in displaying patriarchal "high-culture" defending its privileges in almost overly sexualised and gendered terms, mirroring and indeed acting out the very hysteria they would consider their patriarchal Law defends against.

cases (like that of Lewis' *The Monk*) unadulterated sexuality. As demonstrated above, late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century English works of Gothic fiction enjoyed a large number of predominantly female readers, but, crucially, also female writers. In this sense the allegorical dramatization of the high/low dyad between masculine "high-culture" and feminine "low-culture" (Gothic romance) as proposed above and which pertains in the case of the allegorical value of Sir Leoline and Christabel, sees Leoline acting the part of the reviewers and their ability to influence the British reading (and indeed writing) public regarding the differentiation between proper and improper literature. It is in this sense that "Christabel" comes to allegorically represent the then current British literary sphere, torn between the patriarchal Law of the reviewers and the novelty of Gothic romance. In the advertisement of the first publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 the authors put literary critics and poets at odds within the first paragraph by stating that:

It is the honourable characteristic of Poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind. The evidence of this fact is to be sought, not in the writings of Critics, but in those of Poets themselves.

(Coleridge & Wordsworth, 1798: [no pagination])

In the second paragraph of the advertisement they go on to implore the reader to "consent to be pleased in spite of that most dreadful enemy to our pleasures, our own pre-established codes of decision" (ibid.). Reading the remainder of the advertisement it becomes apparent that the greater part of it is dedicated to the defence of the poems and the novelty which they offer (such as being composed in the language of the lower and middle classes). It is subsequently evident that Wordsworth and Coleridge were not only keenly aware of the critics' and discerning readers' "pre-established codes of decision", but that they considered them detrimental to the development of a new and innovative British literary ethos. Accordingly, seeing as Coleridge started the composition of "Christabel" a year prior to the first publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, it is evident that the critics and their overly stringent gatekeeping were, at least in the writing of the advertisement, uppermost in the minds of Wordsworth and Coleridge.<sup>42</sup> It would therefore seem less contrived and indeed more probable that Coleridge would imbue Sir Leoline and Christabel with allegorical functions which dramatize the problematic relationship between the critics and their Law, and the growing reading and writing public, with its yearning for novelty and innovation. However, it is also evident from Coleridge's reviews of Radcliffe's novels that perhaps his greatest charge against this genre was, actually, its conventionality. This, as it pertains to "Christabel", will become more

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<sup>42</sup> The same notion is evident in how Coleridge portrays literary critics in his poem "Monody on the Death of Chatterton". Here the critics, with their harsh reviews after Chatterton's ousting, are arguably held as accomplices to, if not the primary cause of, Chatterton's suicide. Shelley will later take the same view in the case of Keats.

evident and indeed more prominent in the paragraphs which are to follow. For now, having analysed the relationship between Christabel and Leoline and its allegorical function, I must concede that such an identification and interpretation cannot pretend to hold much validity, and frankly does not make sense, without my further identifying the allegorical function of the poem's antagonist, Geraldine.

Regarding the allegorical nature of Christabel, it has been shown how she is an embodiment of the qualities of heroines common to sentimental literature and how, in the construction of her character, Coleridge conforms to the almost clichéd characteristics of the Radcliffian heroine. As also pointed out, however, Christabel is not only a version of the typical Radcliffian heroine; in conjunction with Leoline she dramatizes aspects of the contemporary British literary world. Geraldine, though, moves on a much more complex and convoluted plane than Christabel. The following discussion shall therefore focus on how Geraldine firstly conforms with and then transcends the role of Gothic heroine, and thereafter assumes the nature of Gothic villain, which would see her allegorically representing Gothic literature as a whole.

When Christabel goes to the forest to pray for her “betrothed knight” (l. 28) she hears Geraldine's moans coming from the other side of the trunk of the ancient mistletoe-covered oak under which she wished to pray. Christabel subsequently finds the lady, after which she, like a true Gothic heroine of heightened sensibility, assists Geraldine by taking her to the castle to recuperate. This initial sympathy which Christabel has toward Geraldine emanates from (among other factors to be discussed) both the characteristics of Christabel as Gothic heroine, as well as the nature of the tale Geraldine tells Christabel explaining the reasons for her current situation. It is my conviction that Geraldine's tale stirs Christabel's sympathy to such an extent as to enable the former's seduction of her. This tale (as well as Geraldine's appearance), however, shares a great many characteristics with the Gothic and can indeed be seen as a Gothic story in its own right; a story which sees Geraldine as the Gothic heroine. Consider Geraldine's initial appearance as well as her account of how she came to be in the forest at midnight:

There [Christabel] sees a damsel bright,  
Drest in a silken robe of white,  
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:  
The neck that made that white robe wan,  
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;  
Her blue-veined feet unsandl'd were,  
And wildly glittered here and there  
The gems entangled in her hair.  
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see  
A lady so richly clad as she—  
Beautiful exceedingly!

Five warriors seized me yestermorn,  
 Me, even me, a maid forlorn:  
 They choked my cries with force and fright,  
 And tied me on a palfrey white.  
 The palfrey was as fleet as wind,  
 And they rode furiously behind.  
 They spurred amain, their steeds were white:  
 And once we crossed the shade of night.  
 As sure as Heaven shall rescue me,  
 I have no thought what men they be;  
 Nor do I know how long it is  
 (For I have lain entranced I wis)  
 Since one, the tallest of the five,  
 Took me from the palfrey's back,  
 A weary woman, scarce alive.  
 Some muttered words his comrades spoke:  
 He placed me underneath this oak;  
 He swore they would return with haste;  
 Whither they went I cannot tell—  
 I thought I heard, some minutes past,  
 Sounds as of a castle bell.  
 Stretch forth thy hand (thus ended she).  
 And help a wretched maid to flee.

(ll. 81-103)

In the passages relating Geraldine's first appearance the speaker emphasises her exoticism and exceeding beauty, which very much call to mind the exotic settings and characters usually found in Gothic novels. The archaic language in these passages also indicates their overt Gothic nature. Thus Geraldine's appearance reflects literary Gothic conventions, and ostentatiously so. Here the very same conventionality Coleridge protests against in his reviews of Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1798) and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) is most perceivable.

The story Geraldine relates to Christabel is one which sees Geraldine as the principal protagonist who is victimized by five warriors who (according to Geraldine's story) have no apparent motive for her capture. Hence, Geraldine portrays herself as the Gothic heroine of an overtly Gothic tale. Geraldine tells the clichéd Gothic tale of a young damsel seized from a benevolent familial environment (situated in the upper stations of society) by ruffians (echoing Radcliffe's banditti as well as the ruffian company Montoni keeps in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*), and who consequently

seems to bear the brunt of masculine violence. This tale is further Gothicised through the presence of stock Gothic elements like white horses, Geraldine's supposed noble lineage, as well as the account of the tallest ruffian who removes Geraldine from the horse, placing her under the oak tree where Christabel found her. His size is that of the classic Radcliffian villain, seeing as these are more often than not men of tall stature; further, these villains have secret discussions the content of which is neither known to the reader nor to the female protagonist. These five men talk secretively before abandoning Geraldine, and in this instance Geraldine employs the classic Gothic strategy of delaying the revelation of crucial parts of the story so as to excite the reader. This tactic, however, is here employed within the story by Geraldine to aid in exciting and ultimately seducing Christabel. Another classic Gothic strategy used in Geraldine's story is her apparent sentimental sensibility, evoked in l. 103. Here she very modestly entreats Christabel to "help a wretched maid to flee" (l.103), a courteous display of sensibility and humility, bordering on self-effacement, which excites the equal show of sensibility in the sympathetic Christabel. So, when looking at the conventionality of the Gothic stories of both Christabel and Geraldine at the point of the poem where they first meet, it is evident that Geraldine commands the more quintessential Gothic story, almost Radcliffian in nature. However, the verity of her story is questionable to say the least. Crucially, though, Swann intimates that it is not only Geraldine's cliché-ridden Gothic story which attracts Christabel through the response it elicits; Geraldine, when first meeting Christabel states: "My sire is of a noble line/ And my name is Geraldine" (ll. 79-80). In so doing, Geraldine, Swann argues, means to say, "I am like you" (1984:533). Here it is essential to note that though Geraldine would have Christabel believe that they are alike, Geraldine is far more exciting in terms of her exotic appearance as well as the current situation (she would have us believe) in which she finds herself. This instance curiously reflects Jane Austen's critique of the female reader of the Gothic evident in the character of Catherine Moreland in *Northanger Abbey*, who constantly identifies with Emily from Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, and in doing so misconstrues uneventful reality for the exciting world of Gothic romance.

Geraldine, as the soon-to-be villain of this poem, cannot be trusted, and therefore her words, like the words of a classic Gothic villain, cannot be taken at face value. She is, as Ulmer indicates, "a false semblance" (2007:397). As it is with her story that Geraldine gains sympathy from Christabel, allowing for her later seduction of "the lovely lady", how can we assume that this story is inherently true? In the passage quoted above, Geraldine, in l. 89, states that "As sure as Heaven" shall rescue her, she has not the faintest idea who those men that abducted her could be. Yet, in a marginal note added by Coleridge to the text in 1824, pertaining to ll. 130-139, he forewarns the reader of the excuses Geraldine makes not to praise the Holy Virgin. Why would she then swear by her surety that Heaven would rescue her that she does not know the identity of the five men who seized her from her father's home? The exclamation might well be ironic; this would indicate that her tale is false and was purposefully constructed with the aim of seducing

Christabel. This fact brings the verity of her claim that Lord Roland de Vaux is her father into question; all these points suggest that she is a Gothic villain who seduces and enchants her victims in accordance with her own secret agenda. Her role as Gothic villain is also cemented by perceptions of her vampiric nature, assumed since the publication of A.H. Nethercot's *The Road to Tryermaine* (1939).

Scholars such as Nethercot, Dramin and Hogle often identify Geraldine as a vampire because of her licentiousness, her seductive charm and her apparent unholiness. Such an identification is often made with specific reference to the scene which sees Geraldine waking Christabel the morning after she has seduced the maiden. Here (ll. 370-376) the speaker states:

And Christabel awoke and spied  
The same who lay down by her side –  
O rather say, the same who she  
Rais'd up beneath the old oak-tree!  
Nay fairer yet! And yet more fair!  
For she belike hath drunken deep  
Of all the blessedness of sleep!

The revived Geraldine appears to have “drunken deep” of more than only the “blessedness of sleep”. Though these qualities certainly are in accordance with what is colloquially vampiric, I believe, as Nethercot also elucidates, that Geraldine's characteristics seem to conform more to those of the lamiae of ancient mythology than those of a vampire. The various ophiological descriptions and actions ascribed to Geraldine throughout the poem would seem to intimate this fact. An instance of ophiological description in the poem sees Geraldine described as cold (almost ectothermic), especially her cold breast, which is the seat of her curse and worker of her power over Christabel (l. 458). Further snake-like associations linked to Geraldine include the apparently projected hissing sounds made by Christabel when Geraldine begins her seduction of Sir Leoline (l. 459), Bracy's vision of the green snake attacking a white dove in the forest (l. 531-554), and most overtly ll. 583-594, where the speaker states:

A snake's small eye blinks dull and shy,  
And the lady's eyes they shrunk in her head  
Each shrunk up to a serpent's eye,  
And with somewhat of malice, and more of dread,  
At Christabel she look'd askance!—  
One moment – and the sight was fled!  
But Christabel in dizzy trance,  
Stumbling on the unsteady ground  
Shudder'd aloud, with hissing sound;  
And Geraldine again turned round,

And like a thing, that sought relief,  
Full of wonder and full of grief,  
She roll'd her large bright eyes divine  
Wildly on Sir Leoline.

In these lines Geraldine's snake-like characteristics are displayed to the already seduced Christabel, while her attractive human characteristics (those of the Gothic heroine) are concomitantly displayed (as they were to Christabel prior to her seduction) to Sir Leoline, who is still in the process of being seduced by Geraldine; therefore this passage in particular cements Geraldine's nature not as a vampire but as a lamia – a mythical daemon most often described as a hybrid between a snake and a woman. When we consider the characteristics of lamiae as they occur in Greek mythology, Geraldine's status as a lamia as well as her allegorical function become more apparent.

Lamiae are often associated with Mormos and Empusae, seeing as all three of these mythological beings are feminine and have characteristics similar to those of vampires and succubae. Unlike vampires, who are said to prey either indiscriminately or to prey on their family or virgins (Nethercot, 1939:80-105), and succubae, who are believed to prey on sleeping men, lamiae are reported to prey on children in the middle of the night by murdering and eating them. They also have the ability to prophesy. In some instances lamiae seduce the parents of a child so as to get at the child. Other myths tell of "Lamia" devouring the children of other mothers because she is jealous of these mothers, seeing as Hera made Lamia eat her own children as a consequence of their being sired by Zeus (Nethercot, 1939:84-85). In this version, the tale of Lamia was told to children by their mothers and nannies across Europe in order to induce good behaviour. Other stories tell of lamiae similar to succubae, in that they prey on young men by seducing them in order to drink their blood.

Geraldine conforms to mythical accounts of lamiae because she chases away Christabel's mother's spirit by saying, "Off woman off! This hour is mine—/ Though thou her guardian spirit be,/ Off woman off, 'tis given to me" (ll. 211-213), as well as the fact that her seductive charms seemingly alienate Christabel from her father. Accordingly, Geraldine echoes Lamia's habit of isolating a child from its parent(s) so that she may consume it. However, she does not physically consume Christabel, she seduces her sexually, and in doing so she places a curse of silence on Christabel. From this point of view, Geraldine's action also reflects the myths of lamiae seducing young men in a sexual succubus-like fashion. This notion is also reflected in the name of Christabel when we consider it again as a composite of the names of Christ and Abel. Cain, according to the apocryphal Gospel of Phillip (as well as the Kabbalah and a number of Jewish Midrashic texts), was the son of the serpent and not of Adam. Nethercot also suggests that the mark on Geraldine's breast connects her to a rich history of marks made on individuals as a

consequence of some transgression of the law; these marks (like the mark of the Beast) are especially prevalent in the Judeo-Christian mythos, linked to characters like Cain and the Anti-Christ (1939:128). Nethercot goes on to show that such a mythos implanted in the Western imagination an obsession with marks indicating a past transgression; a notion especially prominent in the West's popular portrayal of witches and the Wandering Jew. When the above is taken into account, whilst recalling that "Abel" is a part of the composite which is Christabel's name, it can be argued that seeing as Abel's murder was perpetrated by (in some accounts) a snake/human hybrid, his murder is somewhat akin to the Lamia-like Geraldine's seduction of Christabel. This seduction of, or predation on the young, innocent and morally exemplary Gothic heroine (Christabel) is common in Gothic novels such as Lewis' *The Monk*, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, as well as the novels of Anne Radcliffe. What makes Geraldine's sexual predation on Christabel extraordinary, as many have noted, is that it seemingly transcends the gender boundaries of typical Gothic fiction seeing as it does not conform to the usual masculine sexual predation, but offers an instance of female on female sexual predation. When viewed against eighteenth century literary history it becomes evident that this is where the crux in Geraldine's presentation as an allegorical character lies.

Thus, Geraldine's seduction of Christabel ruptures Gothic literary conventions in that it is doubly transgressive. This has various connotations in eighteenth century literature as well as the criticism it received, but when taking a closer look at the poem it becomes evident that Geraldine is not as feminine as she would seem, and as a result is placed closer in proximity to the typical masculine Gothic villain.

This might seem a hazardous assertion, but I feel that Coleridge enciphers her masculinity through references to ancient masculine symbols with which she is intricately connected throughout the poem. The following passages will aim to show that these symbols of Geraldine's masculinity mirror and improve (as far as the retention of original meaning of ancient symbols is concerned) canonized Gothic conventions on both the literary and political levels.

In ll. 57-68 we see Christabel discovering Geraldine underneath the old oak, more specifically the oak upon which mistletoe grows. The oak in itself is a long-revered symbol, especially one with deep roots in heraldry and Britain's medieval past. According to Biederman, the German Romantic poets had great reverence for the oak as a symbol of unshakeable power (1992:243). Throughout Germanic and Celtic history, indeed, the oak was revered, with specific male connotations, seeing as the acorn was deemed a male sexual symbol. Biederman goes on to state that this connection was most probably made because of the acorn's resemblance to a penis, and according to Biederman the word "glans" (referring anatomically to a specific part of the penis) is named as such because of the Latin *glans* referring to an acorn. Consequently,

Geraldine is introduced to both Christabel and the reader in a symbolically masculine surrounding which has both ancient and Gothic connotations. This notion is strengthened through the mention of the mistletoe growing upon this particular oak. Not only does the mistletoe subtly hint towards Geraldine's parasitic nature, but according to Biederman the mistletoe was held in veneration by Celtic druids because it was thought to be the sexual organ of the oak, considering the way in which it protrudes from the normal shape of the tree as well as the fact that the viscous juice of the berries resembles ejaculate and was consequently regarded by the druids as the sperm of the oak (1992:223-224). In Germanic and Nordic myth, Loki turned mistletoe in the hand of the blind god Höd into a lethal spear which killed Balder, the god of vegetation and light. Only after the end of the world can Höd and Balder begin a new life in paradise. Biederman states that in this mythology, mistletoe thus comes to symbolize an innocent tool "that becomes an instrument of doom through evil magic, as does the god who throws it, Balder's blind brother" (1992:224). Coleridge would arguably have been aware of the Germanic/Nordic mythological significance of mistletoe because, according to O'Donoghue, he planned to write an epic poem about the Norse god Thor (2014:104); also, he was possibly influenced by Robert Southey, who was particularly involved with Norse literature, especially that of Cottle.

The notion of mistletoe as an innocent tool that becomes an instrument of doom in the hands of the innocent is also evident in the etymology of the name Geraldine. The name Geraldine is derived from the German "Gerald", and is largely used in English, French and German. It is a name derived from two elements: *ger*, meaning spear, and *wald*, meaning to rule (Anon. 2015). Being a feminine derivative of the name Gerald, Geraldine also means "spear rule". As the first part of the poem was written shortly before Coleridge's trip to Germany (a period which saw him deepening his acquaintance with the German language (Holmes:2005)), it is not too farfetched to imply that he was aware of the etymology of the name and consequently consciously chose it with these elements in mind.<sup>43</sup> When conceding that Coleridge had an interest in and knowledge of Norse, Germanic and Celtic mythology, it is perceptible that Geraldine may indeed be purposefully linked to the masculine notions implied by these mythologies and their reverence for the spear-like mistletoe and revered oak.

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<sup>43</sup> Nethercot feels Coleridge appropriated the name from Hutchinson's *History of Cumberland*, an idea that sees Coleridge merely using a name that is of historical significance to the Lake District. Given that evidence abounds as to hidden meanings in the etymology of the names of Leoline, Christabel, and Roland de Vaux (a discussion of which is soon to follow), is it not short sighted to make such assumptions? Why would there be evidence for the etymological importance of the other characters' names but not for (arguably) the most interesting character in the poem? I do not mean to question the fact that Coleridge might have come across the name "Geraldine" in his wide reading, but given his curiosity and love for etymology as well as the evidence behind the importance of the etymology of the other character's names, I hope to convince the reader that the name "Geraldine" was not merely chosen with only historical associations in mind.

From the above, the possibility that Coleridge purposefully and very cleverly reveals Geraldine's masculine characteristics through a complex web of ancient symbols becomes apparent. Accordingly, symbols and images from the Gothic past are appropriated to perform the same allegorical task of artistically commenting on society. As shown in the first chapter, this process whipped the late eighteenth century men of letters into a frenzy because of their fear of simulacra, a very real fear during the early years of the Industrial Revolution.

In "Christabel", especially with Geraldine, Coleridge utilises archaic language and symbols in a way that sees these symbols retain their original meaning and significance whilst adding new contemporary meaning. Thus, he does not reproduce them as plain simulacra, but reinvigorates both these ancient symbols and the Gothic through establishing a reciprocal and innovative relationship that sees these symbols retain meaning in a popular genre, which was often deemed to rely on empty and clichéd symbols. The creative process which Hogle contends sees Coleridge attempting to situate his Gothic "Christabel" above the perceived cultural level of the Gothic as a whole, would therefore not only include the insertion of falsely antiquated diction so as to link the tale to the "high literature" of Spenser and Shakespeare, but would also see Coleridge utilising ancient symbols whilst retaining their original meaning (2005:18). He subsequently does not commit one of the chief faults of the Gothic, that of recycling simulacra in a mechanical manner that leads to these revered symbols losing their semantic potency; their semantic potency remains original and substantial. Coleridge might thus be seen as being able to out-Gothic the Gothic, because he harkens back to times of yore whilst retaining the historical and semantic accuracy of the ancient symbols. He accordingly revivifies a genre infamous for clichés and historical and semantic inaccuracy. When viewed in this way, the Gothic clichés in Geraldine's tale of how she came to be abandoned in the forest, as well as Coleridge's comments on eighteenth century Gothic fiction evident in his reviews, add to the perception that Geraldine is an allegorical representation of the Gothic.

The notion that Geraldine's story does not necessarily hold any truth and that it is a classic Gothic tale which inspires sympathy and excites the emotions of Christabel, ultimately leading to her seduction, has been discussed above. Her story contains the typical ingredients of a Gothic work of fiction, ingredients which very often have their origin in the past, but which were utilised by eighteenth century writers, philosophers and politicians to refer symbolically to certain notions or institutions, consequently becoming mechanically reproduced simulacra.

In Geraldine's tale one of these symbolic scenarios is shown to be her abduction by five warriors, a familiar Gothic trope. The accompanying sense of masculine oppression, of unduly harsh treatment of the heroine, was often linked to the related oppressive practices of society, or to criticise Jacobin or Anti-Jacobin ideology. The secretive conversation the men have under the

tree is also common to Gothic fiction; some scholars feel that this aspect of Gothic fiction alludes to the paranoid belief after the American and French Revolutions that these revolutions were inspired by a secret society aspiring towards world domination. Considering all these facts, it seems clear that Geraldine's tale is in fact a very conventional Gothic tale laced with underground histories. Its conventional Gothic nature is perhaps best validated by her claiming that Lord Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine is her father; a claim which (as we will see in what follows) mirrors the historical resonances found in Gothic literature.

Roland de Vaux (or Vaux) is an actual historically validated individual and baron of Tryermaine.<sup>44</sup> According to Francfort, Tryermaine was made part of the barony of Gilsland, Cumberland, which belonged to a Saxon family at the time of the Norman Conquest, but which was entrusted to Hubert de Vaux after the death of Gilmour, Lord of Tryermaine in the twelfth century (1826:465). Hubert gave Tryermaine to his son Ranulph, and Ranulph, being Lord of all Gilsland, gave Tryermaine to his younger brother Roland de Vaux, after which there was a long line of Roland de Vaux's, all lords of Tryermaine. The name "Vaux" or "de Vaux" has its origins in Normandy and means "the value". Geraldine's tale, as discussed above, is a fable, constructed with the sole purpose of seducing Christabel. However, her claim that she is the daughter of Roland de Vaux, whom Sir Leoline recognises as his long lost best friend, gives the tale a measure of credence. Accordingly, if we believe that Geraldine's tale is a work of fiction designed to seduce Christabel, the power of her story lies in the context which validates it. Geraldine validates her story to Sir Leoline by wringing his heart strings; she is the abducted and thoroughly distressed daughter of his estranged best friend. Seeing that classical lamiae were reported to have received the power of prophecy from Zeus, the notion that she could have known of Sir Leoline's acquaintance with Roland de Vaux through supernatural means and consequently utilised it to seduce him, making him turn against his daughter, is not at all farfetched. When viewing these notions against the genesis of British Gothic fiction as shown by the publication history of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Geraldine's role as allegorical seductress in the poem becomes more apparent.

The first chapter of this dissertation has shown that Walpole first published *The Castle of Otranto* with an introduction stating that it was a tale written by an Italian monk written between the eleventh- and thirteenth centuries of which he is merely the translator. In the second edition

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<sup>44</sup>A.H. Nethercot shows convincingly, if in a contrived way, how the "library cormorant" Coleridge may have come across the line of Roland de Vaux's in the North-Country near the Scottish border in his reading of Hutchinson's *History of Cumberland* (1939:168-170). Nethercot, however, does not infer any etymological value in the name, and merely argues that Coleridge considered the name appropriate, seeing as it actually referred to a historical person inhabiting Cumberland. H.J. Jackson, however, emphasises Coleridge's love, and indeed reverence, for the study of the history of words (1983:75-88). Given that sound evidence abounds as to the etymological influence in the names of the other characters, it would seem that Vaux, meaning, again, "the value" (valuable indeed for Geraldine), is of just as great importance as the notion that Roland de Vaux is an actual historically validated name and not one dreamt up from scratch.

however, he admits to the fabricated nature of his first introduction, and adds the subtitle, “a Gothic story”. With Walpole in mind, it is evident that from its conception the British Gothic romance sought to validate itself and its fictionality by feigning true historicity. This tradition was continued in later Gothic fiction, seeing as it placed itself in the distant past and utilised all the images and archaisms which went along with it. It is noticeable that (as with Walpole) Geraldine’s tale seeks validity through its reference to a historically real individual. Consequently, Coleridge mimics in Geraldine’s story not only the usual trappings of the Gothic, such as ruthless men, castles, white horses, archaic language and barons, but also the Gothic’s purposeful attempts at historical validation. Thus Geraldine becomes an allegorical seductress who illustrates the seductive techniques Gothic fiction employs on its readers. This notion is more apparent when viewed against Coleridge’s review of Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* in 1794.

The same powers of description [as in *The Romance of the Forest*] are displayed, the same predilection is discovered for the wonderful and the gloomy—the same mysterious terrors are continually exciting in the mind the idea of a supernatural appearance, keeping us, as it were, upon the very edge and confines of the world of spirits [...] curiosity is kept upon the stretch from page to page, and from volume to volume, and the secret, which the reader thinks himself every instant on the point of penetrating, flies like a phantom before him, and eludes his eagerness till the very last moment of protracted expectation. [...] This method is, however, liable to the following inconvenience, that in the search of what is new, an author is apt to forget what is natural. [...] Curiosity is raised far oftener than it is gratified; or rather, it is raised so high that no adequate gratification can be given it; the interest is completely dissolved once the adventure is finished, and the reader, when he is got to the end of the work, looks about in vain for the spell which had bound him so strongly to it.

(Coleridge, 1794)

Here Coleridge likens the suspense of the Gothic novel to a spell which has been cast over an individual, consequently affirming the seductive power of Gothic romance. Crucially, he states that after one has read the novel, one cannot identify what it was that bound one to the novel in the first place, the same idea noticeable in Geraldine’s seduction of Christabel, a seduction initiated by her novelesque and stunning appearance as well as her trite Gothic tale. It is a seduction which is initiated with ease and which leaves Christabel voiceless as to what happened to her. Consequently, Geraldine’s seduction of Christabel mirrors Coleridge’s sense of the spell which binds the reader to *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

This notion is also evident in the similarity between Christabel’s willingness to invite Geraldine into her home (thereafter succumbing to Geraldine’s licentiousness) and Coleridge’s critique on Gothic literature in his review of Radcliffe’s *The Italian*. In this review he states that:

It was not difficult to foresee that the modern romance [...] would soon experience the fate of every attempt to please by what is unnatural, and by a departure from that observance of real life, which has placed the works of Fielding, Smollett, and some other writers, among the permanent sources of amusement. It might for a time afford an acceptable variety of persons whose reading is confined to works of fiction, and who would, perhaps, be glad to exchange dullness for extravagance; but it was probable that, as its constitution (if we may so speak) was maintained only by the passion of terror, and that excited by trick, and as it was not conversant in incidents and characters of a natural complexion, it would degenerate in repetition, and would disappoint curiosity.

(Coleridge, 1798)

Coleridge comments on the sameness of the unremarkable and overused methods employed by the typical Gothic romance in order to generate readerly excitement. It is this sameness which, according to this review, would undoubtedly lead to the gradual waning of the popularity of Gothic romance. Coleridge also refers to the reader of these novels as an individual who seeks to “exchange dullness for extravagance”, and this notion is evident in Christabel’s initial interest in Geraldine. Seeing as there are only a few instances in the poem that refer to Christabel’s life before her episode with Geraldine (instances like the death of her mother and the love shown by her father) we may again accept, as we have above, that Christabel has thus far led a “dull” life prior to her encounter with Geraldine. She goes into the forest to pray for her betrothed knight, an act which, as suggested before, alludes to the dullness of her life, because the only thing in the poem that indicates that there might have been some prior degree of excitement in her life is that she is thus betrothed. With her knight being far away, it is understandable that Christabel should be open to another source of excitement or stimulation. The dullness of her castle existence is also demonstrated in the ritualistic ringing of the bell, which implies wearisome sameness; a notion which might be supported by the fact that Christabel’s name contains the word “bell”, further connecting her (at least through phonic suggestion) to tired conventionality. Her urge for stimulation, or at least change, also explains her willingness to assist the exotic Geraldine (leading to her unwitting seduction), which mirrors the urge for excitement of the reading public to which Coleridge refers in the passage above. These links between Coleridge’s criticism of Gothic literature and his arguably most overtly Gothic poem cannot be overlooked, and illustrate therefore the poem’s proposed status as an allegorical poem which critiques the Gothic by appropriating its own conventions and literary traditions. Perhaps the most evident similarity between one of Coleridge’s comments on Gothic literature and “Christabel”, is to be found in Chapter XXIV of the *Biographia Literaria*. He writes on the “Devotees of the Circulating Libraries”, libraries which were often heavily stocked with Gothic fiction, and condemns the reading of such novels as a “kill time” rather than a pastime. He goes on to write that the reading of this type of literature is to be called

[...] a sort of beggarly day-dreaming, during which the mind of the dreamer furnishes for itself nothing but laziness, and a little mawkish sensibility; while the whole materiel [*sic*] and imagery of the doze is supplied *ab extra* by a sort of mental *camera obscura* manufactured at the printing office, which *pro tempore* fixes, reflects, and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium, so as to people the barrenness of a hundred other brains afflicted with the same trance or suspension of all common sense and all definite purpose. We should therefore transfer this species of amusement (if indeed those can be said to retire *a musis*, who were never in their company, or relaxation be attributable to those, whose bows are never bent) from the genus, reading, to that comprehensive class characterized by the power of reconciling the two contrary yet coexisting propensities of human nature, namely, indulgence of sloth, and hatred of vacancy.

(2004, 161)

In this instance Coleridge likens the reading of novels, especially of Gothic novels, to daydreaming and to a "morbid trance", which sees the reader having no control over the fantastic images created by another mind and projected into his in a fashion similar to the working of the *camera obscura*. In ll. 267-318 the spell which binds Christabel, worked by the curse in Geraldine's breast, is mainly described in terms of vision, trance and dream (ll. 267, 271, 292-295, 312). Accordingly, Geraldine holds Christabel in this dreamlike state, a state in which a homoerotic element in their relationship reaches its peak. When viewed against the passage quoted above it becomes evident that Geraldine induces a dreamlike state in Christabel in the same manner as the Gothic romance induces in its reader a "morbid trance", another instance which corroborates the perception that Geraldine and Christabel allegorically refer to the Gothic romance and its writers and readers.

This notion becomes clearer still when considering which qualities of Geraldine initially intrigue the speaker, Christabel, and the reader. When Christabel (and the reader) first discovers Geraldine, we are struck by the latter's tall stature, fair skin, beautiful white dress and the jewels which adorn her hair. It is these material characteristics that stir excitement. Her worldly beauty uncannily reflects the cheap entertainment and material excitement characteristic of Gothic literature so heavily criticised by Coleridge as well as other critics. When contemplating Geraldine's true motives, it seems especially evident that Coleridge reveals that, like the Gothic, though she may at first seem exciting and novel, her spiritual nature proves to be unwholesome.

Considering that the greater percentage of Gothic novelists in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century Britain were women, and that by 1795 this genre had captured around thirty eight per cent of the British market (of which the majority of this percentile were women) (Hogle, 2005:21), one may understand why Coleridge chose a female to play the Gothic villain in this particular poem. By breaking Gothic convention in portraying his Gothic villain in "Christabel" as

a female, Coleridge emulates and continues the convention of gendering and sexualizing the sociological problems raised by romance and Gothic romance in particular.

As shown above, for Mudge (1992:94) and Swann (1984 &1985), Coleridge conforms to eighteenth- and early nineteenth century literary criticism because of the fact that he feminizes the problem raised by the novel in general and the Gothic novel in particular. Mudge goes on to state, like Swann, that by feminizing the problem these men of letters placed the tradition of high literature well above the turmoil of the market place of the lower, “feminine” literatures. Mudge means that by containing and policing the female Gothic through their feminization, the critics sought to “ensure the purity of serious literature” (1992:100). What should also be kept in mind here is that this period in history saw the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, which transformed Britain’s economy into a free market, capitalist economy, which contributed greatly to the rise of the middle class. Accordingly, fervent consumerism took hold, especially, in the field of literature, the fanatic consumption of popular, sensational and cheap Gothic works of fiction. As most of the writers of these fictions were, again, female, and that at this time it was commonly held that the only females who earned money were prostitutes, it is understandable why most critics often likened the sensational, cheap works of Gothic fiction written by women (which frequently promised financial gain), to the occupation and services rendered by prostitutes. Once this link has been established, it is plain to see why critics would have thought that the lucrative trade in Gothic fiction, along with its corrupting tendencies, mirrored middle-class men seeking cheap thrills from lower class prostitutes. Accordingly, this tendency was very often circumscribed by the views associated with a newly emerging bourgeois sexuality (Mudge, 1991:179-184; Swann, 1984:533-553; Swann, 1985:397-418).

What this means for the allegorical nature of this poem is that Coleridge joins the many voices who saw this problem in gender-based and sexual terms by showing Geraldine’s homoerotic seduction of Christabel, which mirrors the critics’ notions of the sensational powers of seduction Gothic authors have over their readers (especially female authors over female readers). This cements the idea that Geraldine and Christabel function allegorically in representing both the literary conventions of the Gothic tradition as well as the author/reader relationship.

Thus far, however, the reader may justly contend that this chapter matter-of-factly accepts Geraldine’s malignity and role of villain. This would imply that Coleridge, following the interpretation above, was whole-heartedly against Gothic romance. As we know, this is simply not the case. Indeed the research of Nethercot, Hogle, Swann, Ulmer and a great many other scholars repeatedly holds that Geraldine’s role as villain does not conform straightforwardly to any pure good versus pure evil model. Such absolutism not only hampers the complexity of the characters and their allegorical function, but also undermines the complexity of Coleridge’s

relationship to Gothic romance. Although this chapter has illustrated Coleridge's contempt for certain aspects of Gothic romance, he also praises salutary aspects thereof in his reviews of the works of Radcliffe, Aikin and even Lewis. If *Geraldine* is to be an allegorical representation of Gothic romance, an interpretation such as the one here undertaken cannot be so absolutist as to argue that she is wholly unwholesome. As with the Mariner's trespasses in the previous chapter, it would seem that there is something Necessitarian at the bottom of her bane.

As indicated above, Nethercot, drawing from Western literature's obsession with marks such as those of Cain, witches and the Wandering Jew, proffers the view that *Geraldine's* mark is, like those of Cane and Medusa, a token of a transgression in her past (1939:127-128). This would be consistent with Lamia mythology, as Nethercot indicates that the earliest accounts of the Lamia mythos incorporate the two essential elements of pity and terror (*ibid.*, 86). Nethercot expounds that the story of Lamia begins with the exceedingly beautiful daughter of Belos and Libya, whose dazzling appearance captivates Zeus (*ibid.*, 84). Zeus and Lamia consequently conceive many beautiful children who are, as indicated earlier, killed by Hera almost upon birth. Some versions of the myth also attribute Lamia's ophiological transformation to Hera's vengeance. Despite the fact that Hera incessantly kills her and Zeus' offspring, undoubtedly inflicting great pain on Lamia, Zeus does not relent in his infatuated pursuit, driving Lamia to the brink of insanity. She consequently hides among the rocks of the shoreline bringing pain, pestilence and death to the children nearby (*ibid.*). Lamia's story is therefore indeed one of pity and terror, while later evolutions of it would rely on abject horror.

The myth would therefore support the notion that although lamiae are to be dreaded, they are also to be pitied. Drawing from this pitiful and terrifying mythos as well as from the intimations of *Derwent* and E.H. Coleridge,<sup>45</sup> Nethercot argues that:

Geraldine acts under some compulsion; her heart is by no means in her acts; she is struggling against some power stronger than herself, which is governing her for some unexplained object of its own [...]

(1939:81)

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<sup>45</sup> Nethercot quotes from the work of E.H. Coleridge (the poet's grandson) stating that "[t]here are indications that the *Geraldine* of the First Part of the poem was at the mercy of some malign influence not herself, and that her melting mood was partly genuine. She is 'stricken' with horror at her unwelcome task, because she cannot at first overcome the temptation to do right. She was in a strait between the contending powers of good and evil" (1939:81).

Intra-textually substantiating such claims, Nethercot points to ll. 188-189<sup>46</sup> and a few lines relating the events shortly after Geraldine has dropped her silken robe (1939:82),<sup>47</sup> which were struck from the text with the 1817-1824 revisions (Damrosch *et al*, 2010:591). Although Nethercot admits that lines such as these, lines which attest to a certain hesitancy or sorrow Geraldine feels at the completion of a task in which she is not whole-heartedly invested, are not quite as conspicuous in the second canto. Nevertheless, he points to l. 574, which sees Geraldine (after successfully convincing Leoline of her lineage and in so doing making him favour her over his daughter Christabel) peering at Christabel with a look “somewhat of malice, and more of dread”. This scene, together with that in the following, ll. 580-584,<sup>48</sup> sees Nethercot concluding that, although instances which display a conflicting duality of good and evil in Geraldine are not as common in Part the second as in Part the first, their continuation is evident (*ibid.*, 82). In conjunction with the lamentable tale of Lamia and intra-textual evidence which hints towards Geraldine being a tragic and geminate villain, Nethercot further substantiates such claims with references to her mark and to daemonology.

As twice indicated above, a mark on the body of an evil-doer has captivated the Western imagination for centuries.<sup>49</sup> It has also been indicated that the mark is often associated with a transgression in the past of the individual who bears it. Nethercot states that Geraldine’s reptilian mark differs from that of other evil literary women like Duessa (which some would contend the character of Geraldine is based upon) in that it does not render itself visible or invisible as a consequence of certain seasons or events, but that it is always present and should therefore be concealed with clothing (*ibid.*, 127). For Nethercot, Geraldine can never escape the symbol of a transgression in her past and it therefore, like the marks of Duessa and Melusina, results in its (and the transgression it symbolises) weighing heavily on her conscience. It is this mark, and the transgression it symbolises, which leads Nethercot to speculate on the hope daemons or spirits have for redemption.

Drawing from Thomas Taylor’s *The Phaedrus of Plato*, published in 1792 (Taylor being a favourite among the theologians studied by Coleridge (*ibid.*, 137)), Nethercot expounds that Taylor’s project of translating and commenting on Plato’s *Phaedrus*, specifically the Platonic classification of daemons into three main taxa, is essentially one of “expiation and amelioration”. Platonic

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<sup>46</sup> “And will your mother pity me,/ Who am a maiden most forlorn?”

<sup>47</sup> These lines were struck and replaced by ll. 248-249. The lines originally read, “Ah! what a stricken look was hers!/ Deep from within she seems half-way/ To lift some weight with sick assay,/ And eyes the maid and seeks delay;/ Then suddenly, as one defied,/ Collects herself in scorn and pride,/ And lay down by the Maiden’s side! [...]”.

<sup>48</sup> “And Geraldine turn’d round,/ And like a thing, that sought relief,/ Full of wonder and full of grief,/ She roll’d her large bright eyes divine/ Wildly on Sir Leoline”.

<sup>49</sup> The fact that marks feature prominently in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “The Three Graves” would insinuate that Coleridge had great interest in marks and the transgression they suppose.

classification of daemons, as Nethercot shows, sees them divided into three main orders. The first of these orders is rational, the second both rational and irrational and the third irrational. Whereas the first is wholly beneficial, many daemons belonging to the latter two genera are said to be “malevolent and noxious” (ibid., 137-138). Nethercot quotes a note from Taylor’s *Phaedrus* which sees Taylor commenting on the Platonic daemoniac taxonomy, in which he contends that:

The distribution of good and evil originates from the daemoniacal genus: for every genus, transcending that of daemons, uniformly possesses good. There are therefore certain genera of daemons, some of which adorn and administer certain parts of the world; but others certain species of animals. The daemon therefore, who is the inspective guardian of life, hastens the soul into that condition, which he himself is allotted; as for instance, into justice or intemperance, and continually mingles pleasure in them as a snare. But there are other daemons transcending these, who are the punishers of souls, converting them to a more pure and elevated life. And the first of these it is necessary to avoid; but the second sort we should render propitious. But there are other daemons more excellent than these, who distribute good, in a uniform manner.

From the argument outlined above along with certain paradoxes in Geraldine’s conduct (such as her alternating strength and weakness), Nethercot concludes (although the exact principles Coleridge wanted Geraldine to embody can never be known with absolute certainty) that she is possessed by and therefore under the agency of some daemoniac force (ibid., 139). Nethercot also implies that the daemoniac taxa from the above excerpt would not have been too alien to Coleridge’s philosophy; this, I believe, might be because of his early Necessitarianism, which, as indicated in the previous chapter, waned with the death of Berkeley Coleridge in 1798. Nonetheless, taking into account the fact that Coleridge started writing the poem in 1797, the assumption that Taylor’s daemons, who punish souls to convert them to a more pure life and who hasten the soul into either the good or the bad condition in which the daemon operates, would have appealed to Coleridge’s Necessitarian philosophy is not too implausible. Thus, Nethercot would see Geraldine as “an unwilling and contrite instrument of destiny” (ibid., 139). Such a conclusion definitely supports, if not informs, the notion that Christabel and Geraldine dramatize innocence making its first and guilty contact with Original Sin, which scholars like Ulmer have argued for since the latter half of the last century and beyond. However, given the evidence presented above, evidence in support of the notion that the poem allegorically dramatizes the British literary sphere’s first contact and consequent relationship with Gothic romance along with Coleridge’s own commentary on the genre, I believe the notion of Geraldine as propitious daemon rendered unwholesome by some governing force would be just as, if not more, warranted.

William Ulmer in his various contestations as to the moral ambivalence evident in “Christabel”, also draws from the assurances of Derwent Coleridge who states that Geraldine “is no witch or

goblin of any kind, but a spirit, executing her appointed task with the best good will” (Ulmer, 2007:404). This would support the notion that she is under the agency of some force and that she very much resembles Taylor’s “propitious” daemons. In defence of the claim that Geraldine is in fact not unwholesome, Ulmer quotes from Coleridge’s *Lectures on Revealed Religion*. Here Coleridge argues that “[i]nnocence implies the Absence of Vice from the absence of temptations [...] Virtue the Absence of Vice from the knowledge of its Consequences” (ibid., 383). The conclusion Ulmer draws from Coleridge’s elucidations as to the differentiation between innocence and virtue is that innocence implies naiveté; it is therefore “unreliable” and “untested” (ibid., 383). Virtue implies knowledge of vice and its consequences. To be virtuous would be preferable to being innocent as it suggests that the individual’s morality has undergone temptation and possibly its consequences, but has nevertheless conquered it to regain purity and, crucially, knowledge of immorality.<sup>50</sup> As such, “the sufferings imparted by evil are morally educative, allowing for inner growth from a false ‘Innocence’ based on inexperience to a genuine ‘Virtue’ based on an understanding of vice and its consequences” (ibid., 404). So, in the light of Taylor’s comments on daemons, it would seem that Geraldine has an appointed task to tempt Christabel and in doing so transform her false innocence, which probably stems from her father’s almost incarceratory over-protection, into a true virtue which has been tested by vice.

This would also be in consonance with Richard Berkeley’s assertions as to seduction and possession as it pertains to the poem. Berkeley argues that “[j]ealousy is possessiveness under threat: either threat of loss, or a threat of lingering on the verge of being, but never attaining it” (2014:262). He goes on to illustrate that “to be possessive of one’s self is the essence of human finitude, [...] In threatening or confusing circumstances – or crucially in circumstances of seduction – we speak of maintaining one’s self-possession; we compliment morally strong individuals as self-possessed” (ibid.). Thus it would seem that Christabel, having exposed herself to confusing and threatening circumstances and being sexually seduced, realises, in her post-seduction state, that her very being is under threat and consequently reels and writhes under the agony of her loss of innocence. This is a fact which in itself illustrates that she is more self-possessed than she was before she had been seduced. Having been tested by vice, naive innocence has therefore been converted into knowledgeable virtue, privy to the allures and consequences, and therefore the true nature, of vice.

Although Berkeley sees “Christabel” as emblematic of Coleridge’s own experiences with Gothic romance, I believe that it is more probable, and indeed more evidentially informed, that

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<sup>50</sup> In his review of *The Monk*, Coleridge lamented the fact that such novels, when read by children, indoctrinate them with the first rudiments of vice, awakening them to sleeping passions. This instance is clearly articulated in the poem by quite literally having Christabel “leap” and “moan” only in her dreams (l. 30); but Geraldine (as allegorical representation of the Gothic) awakens her sexually.

"Christabel", through convoluted and palimpsestic allegory, functioning on multiple planes, dramatizes the then current British literary sphere's initial experiences with the genre. Coleridge instructs not only the critics, the readers and the writers of Gothic fiction by exposing their faults, but he also instructs the genre itself, in an attempt to rescue it from its own inanities, by lifting a "looking-glass" to them, in a similar fashion to the Female Gothic's presenting a "looking-glass", to "expose the perils lurking in the father's corridors of power" (Williams, 1995:107). Coleridge's "looking-glass" in "Christabel" exposes however, not only these "perils", but also the perils and faults he would see in the various role-players in Britain's practice of the literary Gothic.

It has been demonstrated how Geraldine is perhaps less in control of her seduction of Christabel than readers often believe and that she does not necessarily enjoy it, nor is she its originator. It has also been revealed that Coleridge introduces Geraldine to Christabel and the reader in the context of an ancient, masculine symbolic environment. That Geraldine's name is etymologically linked to *ger* and *wald* ("spear" "rule") has also been indicated. Aware of the Norse mythological associations between mistletoe and a spear, we understand that Coleridge did not see Geraldine as the absolute incarnation of evil or sin. That is, as we have seen, in Norse mythology Loki turns mistletoe into a spear in the hands of Höd. Höd then kills his brother Balder; only after the end of the world may they start a new life in paradise. From this perspective, mistletoe is an innocent tool which is transformed by evil to consequently become a tool of doom. It is in this symbolic context that not only the allegorical dramatization of a British literary ethos becomes more apparent, but also the edification imbued by Coleridge in such an allegory. Consequently, this chapter can inch closer to a conclusion.

This chapter has illustrated how Coleridge deliberately adheres to and transcends Gothic conventions in "Christabel". I have shown, drawing from the question-answer sequence, that he is acutely aware of such breaks and adherences, and that this attests to his in-depth knowledge of the genre and its principal faults. It also attests to his almost flippantly admitting to the project he has in mind with the writing of "Christabel". With special attention paid to the characters and their allegorical function, this chapter has argued that Sir Leoline refers allegorically to patriarchal (both literary and political) tyranny, Christabel to the British reading public as well as to the archetypal heroine of the Radcliffian Gothic, and Geraldine to the Gothic as a genre itself.

From this it has been argued that Sir Leoline represents Coleridge's contemporary critics and their Law. As such he wishes to keep Christabel, representative of the British readership, firmly under his control, prescribing to her what is proper and what not. Geraldine, as an allegorical representation of the Gothic, allures and seduces Christabel just as the Gothic as genre has seduced a great portion of the British readership by the late eighteenth century. Crucially, Geraldine also seduces Sir Leoline, an instance which would seem to invalidate my interpretation

as it has been propounded thus far. However, authors like Chatterton and Horace Walpole at first presented their works as original historical works which they merely found and translated (in Walpole's case) or found and published in the case of Chatterton. These authors were at first kindly received by the critics and one may argue that their initial reception was favourable because it came at a time when Britain's Gothic past was re-evaluated and even used to substantiate claims as to the propriety of the form of the British Government in parliament. Coleridge imitates this by having Geraldine feign relations with Roland de Vaux who is a long lost friend of Leoline's. The fact that Roland de Vaux is the character with the most concrete historical resonance (despite Nethercot's contrived intimations on the historical origins of the names of the other characters),<sup>51</sup> would support the notion that Geraldine seduces Leoline not necessarily with her beauty, but because she reminds him of his past; she therefore emulates the process which saw Walpole and Chatterton gain fame – through contriving a sense of historicity which was at the time much needed in order to give "value" to British rule, and, in this case, patriarchal Law as it pertains to literature and politics.

Leoline is unaware of the effects of the stringent constraints he places on Christabel. One of these effects is keeping her in his mundane world which remembers and glorifies the dead (Christabel's mother).<sup>52</sup> It has been revealed that this world is not satisfactory for Christabel, because of her need for novelty and sexual knowledge and release (evident from the dreams that make her leap and moan). Leoline, it would seem, affects the opposite of what he intends; his constraints and law only serve to make Christabel long for that from which he shields her.<sup>53</sup> This would reflect the prudish reviews the Gothic often generated. By hoping to prescribe to the changing British readership, the critics, through their hysterical responses, may, in fact, stimulating the sheer curiosity of their readers, have made the Gothic even more popular. However, one may by no means assert that with this allegory Coleridge only critiques the reviewers while he glorifies the Gothic.

Geraldine, as an allegorical representation of the Gothic, with her resemblance to many Gothic villains such as Schedoni and Montoni, cannot be deemed less guilty of Christabel's seduction than Leoline, though, as demonstrated above, she seems to act under some compulsion coming from beyond herself. Crucially, however, it has been shown that Geraldine's seduction of

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<sup>51</sup> Remembering that I have shown above that "Vaux" means "value", this notion enjoys more support.

<sup>52</sup> Incidentally, the "Five and forty beads" which the sexton must count in l. 329 correspond to Biblical numerology, where various sources attest to the number forty-five meaning to preserve, maintain and protect things which are dear to you (Anon. 2017).

<sup>53</sup> This instance coincidentally reminds me of an instance which saw Coleridge's father, having realised that the romances young Samuel was reading were affecting him adversely (his overactive imagination rendering Coleridge anxious and fearful at prospects such as being alone in the dark, believing himself haunted by spectres), burnt the books in a brutal act of censorship (Nethercot, 1939:186). Despite his father's efforts, Coleridge, as we know, would forever be enamoured of romance.

Christabel, and Christabel's consequent realisation of her trespasses, in spite of which she remains inherently morally upright (her very realisation attesting to the fact), would make it seem that Geraldine has the Necessitarian function of guiding Christabel from naive innocence to informed virtuousness in the manner of specific genera of Platonic daemons as described by Taylor. Like the Gothic genre itself, Geraldine has been "branded" by her past trespasses. The trespasses the Gothic committed would include unoriginality, the generation of simulacra and banal, almost voyeuristic sexuality; all charges made by Coleridge in his reviews and other writings. Her clichéd Gothic tale which enables her to enter Langdale Hall, betrays Geraldine's unoriginality; her supposed relation to Roland de Vaux divulges the notion of producing historical simulacra so as to gain approval; her homosexual seduction of Christabel is representative of the Gothic's sexual obsession (especially for taboo sexual representations such as those in Lewis' *The Monk*) and may also reflect how largely female Gothic authors seduced a largely female readership. Yet, despite these "marks", these inanities, Geraldine remains exceedingly fair and exotic. Her novelty, yet familiarity (reflected in her supposed familial relations), emulates the salutary aspects which the Gothic had on a British reading public. This was a public in need of an enlivened literary diet in a fast-changing world rife with news of extreme violence and the destruction of age-old governmental structures over the channel in France, across the Atlantic in the American colonies, and to an extent even at home, with Jacobins questioning the established British form of rule amidst the birth convulsions of the Industrial Revolution.

But what of Geraldine's name and its etymological connotations? In this chapter I have twice pointed to the links between Geraldine's name and the mistletoe on the oak under which she is found, and have shown it to be intricately connected to Norse mythology. From Coleridge's reviews, especially his reviews of the work of Radcliffe and Lewis, we learn that he often had an inclination not only to point out the flaws of the Gothic as popular genre, but also to point out ineptitudes in the authors' treatment thereof. In his review of *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Coleridge intimates his duty, and indeed the duty of the reviewer in general, to "guard against those faults which are concealed from common eyes under an accumulation of their beauties" (Coleridge, 1794). He goes further to say that the prominence and popularity of the writer of such works, are directly in relation to the reviewer's "duty to guard against those faults" (ibid.). So he would charge Radcliffe with exuberance of description, contrived plots bordering on the unnatural, and, as we have seen, of excessive use of the withholding of information so as to generate suspense and excitement. In his review of *The Monk*, Coleridge laments the "little expense of thought" with which the writers of Gothic fiction contrive their trite settings and horrific plots. Though he would admit to certain excellences in Lewis' work, he argues that the "errors and defects are numerous, [...] and of greater importance" (ibid.). In this review he would further intimate that "[t]o trace nice boundaries, beyond which terror and sympathy are deserted by pleasurable emotions, – to reach

those limits, yet never to surpass them, *hic labor, hic opus eat [sic]*,<sup>54</sup> and that “figures that shock the imagination, and narratives that mangle the feelings rarely discover genius, and always betray low and vulgar taste” (Coleridge, 1797). Drawing from Coleridge’s critique of the authors of Gothic fiction evident in the passages quoted above, one can determine, once more, that he was not as opposed to the genre itself, as to the often corrupting (both morally and literary) manners in which the authors thereof would treat it. Consequently, considering the etymology of Geraldine’s name, along with the prominent mention of the oak covered in mistletoe under which she is introduced in the poem (and the symbolic and mythological notions implied therein), one may come to recognise instructive notions purposefully, but very subtly, instilled by Coleridge into his allegorical representation of Gothic fiction.

Like the mistletoe on the oak, Geraldine, and therefore the Gothic, is a parasitic offshoot from the masculine high literature of Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Percy, and perhaps even Chaucer. The mistletoe is part of the masculine oak, but also not. It is, like Geraldine, alien yet native, destructive yet venerated; it and Geraldine alike are in essence intruders falsifying their claim to existence by claiming to be part of the object of their predation; in short, they are false semblances and simulacra. But the mytho-symbolic meaning of the mistletoe also plays an important role in our coming fully to understand Geraldine as an allegorical representation of the Gothic as genre. Seeing as the mistletoe is a symbol of an innocent tool turned destructive, one may concede, keeping Coleridge’s knowledge of Norse mythology in mind, that he purposefully introduces Geraldine in close conjunction with the mistletoe so as to show that she, an allegorical representation of the Gothic genre, has become a destructive tool in the hands of a prolific and at times subpar brand of authors, often more inspired by fame and fortune than any literary excellence. This would tie in not only with the mechanical reproduction of Gothic fiction at the time, as well as the vulgar incidents often included therein so as to shock and to gain larger readership, but also with the notion that Nethercot identifies: that Geraldine is an unwilling participant who is obliged by some higher power to seduce and attempt to corrupt Christabel; that the Gothic, imaged in Geraldine, is not vulgar or corrupting in itself,<sup>55</sup> but that its authors, a governing higher power, corrupt it with their own ineptitudes, vulgarity and baneful attempts at getting their books sold.

Considering my extensive treatment of the other characters in “Christabel”, the reader may justly question why I have remained relatively silent about the allegorical roles of Christabel’s mother and Bracy the Bard. Quite frankly, the reasons as to my silence are because an in depth analysis

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<sup>54</sup> The misspelled or misprinted Latin phrase meaning, “this is the task, this is the hard work”.

<sup>55</sup> I believe Coleridge illustrates this in ll. 239-248 where Geraldine’s power wanes just prior to the act of her seduction. That this instance sees Coleridge illustrating that not only is the Gothic damaged by the sexually explicit, but that it is not the genre in itself which aims to be vulgar but rather some higher power which has compulsion over it. That is, its inept authors.

of the allegorical functions of these characters would unnecessarily lengthen an already long chapter, and my interpretation simply does not warrant lengthy explications about the role of these characters. However, failure to at least briefly deal with them will doubtlessly do a disservice to this analysis of “Christabel”, if not to the poem itself.

Many have commented on the role of Christabel’s mother in the poem, more specifically on her role as guardian spirit. I would argue, however, as Swann argues for Coleridge’s relationship with the Gothic, that the mother is “an alien, internal body” inhabiting both Christabel and Leoline (1984:404). Alien, because she is dead, as a consequence of which she has been internalised by both Leoline and Christabel in ways that best fit them. In terms of Leoline, one may deduce that her loss dramatizes (I have earlier touched on this) Williams’ theory that the “Male Gothic is a dark mirror reflecting patriarchy’s *nightmère*, recalling a perilous, violent, and early separation from the mother/*mater* denigrated as ‘female’” (1995:107). She is the female side which Leoline has lost,<sup>56</sup> as a consequence of which he constructs his stringent and imprisoning corridors of power, which Williams would see the Female Gothic exposing (ibid.), and which are indeed exposed by the allegorical representation of the Gothic, Geraldine. The loss of the mother is the reason why Leoline is overly protective and indeed possessive of Christabel, which ironically aids in her seduction. The loss of the mother and Leoline’s response to it may also allegorically refer to Coleridge’s conviction, as is evident in his lectures on the Slave Trade, that the ruling class is too cold and unfeeling. These attributes, as the exact opposites of a mother’s warmth and care, would imply that the patriarchal legislators (both political and literary) of which Leoline is an allegorical representation, have lost touch with the female side.<sup>57</sup> On a literary level this may also infer the injustice done to novel and romance by the literary critics of the preceding Augustan era, who denigrated them as “female”.

For Christabel her mother is a faint, almost unknown entity, clouded in uncertainty. Christabel has quite literally replaced her mother in her household by being born at the same time her mother dies. Allegorically, the mother may therefore refer to Leoline’s forcing Christabel to live in a restrictive, patriarchal world of death, in a similar fashion which saw the literary critics attack innovations such as Gothic Romance in preference for the works of “high” literature of the British

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<sup>56</sup> Richard Holmes (1999:495) provides a quote from a notebook entry made by Coleridge in 1829 on the subject of gender. In this entry Coleridge writes: “In the best and greatest of men [...] there is a female ingredient. [...] There is a *Woman* in Man. [...] [I]n every true and manly man there is a translucent Under-tint of the Woman”.

<sup>57</sup> In a similar fashion, Goh (2003:279) indicates that Coleridge, in “Ode to the Departing Year”, refers to Britain, which in the context of the poem suffers under patriarchal ambitions, as “Albion, my mother isle” (l. 121). This sees Coleridge juxtaposing nurturing Britain of old (as suggested by the archaic “Albion”), which is still not out of reach, with the current Britain, under ambitious patriarchal and commercial rule, but crucially “not yet enslaved, not wholly vile” (l. 122). This instance sees the legendary Britain of old retaining its salutary aspects despite patriarchal misgovernance, much in the same way in which Christabel’s mother remains an ideal despite the fact that Christabel could only learn of her through her father.

poetic fathers. The imaginative romance conducive to the free play of the imagination, denigrated as “low” and “female”, has therefore been suppressed by critics.<sup>58</sup> As discussed, their suppression, however, leads ironically to their being explored by the British readership (paralleling the fact that Leoline’s suppression leads to the seduction of Christabel). This, in conjunction with aspects from other poems, will be discussed in the conclusion of this dissertation. Yet there is one character in the poem who, with almost prophetic vision, is inclined to believe that there is evil in their midst, Bracey the bard. A consequent discussion involving Bracey, however short, is therefore obligatory, before I conclude the chapter.

Bracey, then, is the only character who senses the presence of evil. In ll. 515-538 he relates that he had dreamed of seeing a green snake attacking Leoline’s favourite dove, also named Christabel, under the old oak tree. This dream itself is an allegory within an allegory, seeing as the snake represents Geraldine, the dove Christabel and the old oak tree the patriarchal power of Sir Leoline, who is just as powerless to stop Geraldine’s seduction of Christabel as the oak would be in attempting to stop the snake from attacking the dove. Bracey’s dream therefore would prove visionary and prophetic, as it allegorically represents the unholy events presently transpiring in Langdale Hall. As a consequence, Bracey asks Sir Leoline’s permission to purge the forest “With music strong and saintly song” (l. 549) “Lest aught unholy loiter there” (l. 551). Yet, he is commanded by a dismissive Sir Leoline to travel to Tryermaine and tell Roland de Vaux that his daughter is safe at Langdale Hall. This instance, of a prophetic Bard hoping through aesthetic means to banish the evil that has been revealed to him in vision, is what I contend to be Coleridge’s project with this ballad.

At the beginning of this chapter I indicated that there is symbolic importance to the cock being awakened by the noise of the owls, consequently giving reply with its own call. In ll. 294-298 we see, after Geraldine’s successful homoerotic seduction of Christabel, that the night-birds are mentioned again:

Thou’st had thy will! By tairn and rill,  
The night-birds all that hour were still.  
But now they are jubilant anew,  
From cliff and tower, tu – whoo! tu – whoo!  
Tu – whoo! tu – whoo! from wood and fell!

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<sup>58</sup> Nethercot (1939:150) indicates that the alliterative phrase which Geraldine uses to dismiss the spirit of Christabel’s mother in l. 199 (“Off, wandering mother! Peak and Pine!”) is rather “queer”. He goes on to illustrate that the words are from Act I, scene iii, of *Macbeth*. Accordingly, we concede that Geraldine commands the mother’s dismissal in the words of a poetic father, thus emulating what I have proposed that the Augustan and some early Romantic critics did in the case of the “female” romance.

Because the Gothic was so popular at the time Coleridge wrote his ballad, many authors plied their trade in writing novels in this genre, novels that, as we have seen, Coleridge deemed to be corruptive in many aspects, both morally and from a literary point of view. At the beginning of the poem the reader is confronted by the crowing cock (an age-old symbol of the apocalypse and/or the ending of an era), and by the cacophonous calls of an owl choir (at midnight, a significantly liminal time), to which the cock responds by uttering his own avian cry. In conjunction with the lines from the poem which are quoted above, along with the allegorical traits that I have identified certain characters to have, I believe this instance sees Coleridge declaring his instructive hopes for "Christabel".

Owls, clock towers and barking dogs are hackneyed elements in the staging of the Gothic genre. Combined with the fact that the owls only continue with their wild hooting after Geraldine has successfully seduced Christabel, would suggest that this scene emulates literary events of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century Britain. Miles indicates that after the initial successes of early authors of the Gothic like Walpole and Radcliffe, publications belonging to the genre proliferated (2006:43). In a similar fashion, we see the hordes of owls only rekindling their previous auditive fervour after Geraldine's seduction of Christabel, just as Gothic fiction and the number of authors thereof proliferated after the British reading public had been won over by a handful of initial Gothic authors. Yet, though at the beginning of the poem the cock gives answer to them, neither the owls nor their sounds are mentioned again until the moment to which I refer above. The crowing of a cock has for a long time been associated in both Christian and Nordic religious and mythological accounts as an avian cry heralding the apocalyptic moment, the moment when passion, "wrought to its uttermost", prevails over the current world order and forces the emergence of a new dispensation. In the opening vignette, which sees the cock awakened by the hooting of the owls, it is conceivable that Coleridge announces this poem to be an apocalyptic moment, where his poetic passion is wrought to its uttermost, in order to overwhelm the effulgence of the cheap Gothic. This is what I believe to be his instructive purpose behind the writing of "Christabel".

In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge comments on what was then termed "German-drama" (Gothic drama) and its origins. Being the Gothic, but only in dramatic form, this German drama, Coleridge contends, is "English in its origin, English in its materials, and English by re-adoption" and that "we [presumably British literature as a whole] should submit to carry our own brat on our own shoulders" (2004:143). This sentiment is echoed in his review of *The Monk*, written ten years prior to the publication of the *Biographia Literaria*, while he was working on "Christabel". In this review Coleridge states that:

Mildness of censure would here be criminally misplaced, and silence would make us accomplices. Not without reluctance then, but in full conviction that we are performing a duty, we declare it to be our opinion, that the Monk is a romance, which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or daughter, he might reasonably turn pale.

(1797)

Accordingly, one may concede that Coleridge saw the betterment of the Gothic genre, not only as a creative possibility, but as his duty, and that to be silent on the matter would make an individual just as guilty as the writers of these vulgar texts.

It is in the light of these and previous expositions that this chapter has hoped to illustrate how "Christabel" functions on many levels, one of which is to allegorically represent the British literary sphere and its problematic relationship with the Gothic at large. One may ask, "but how is such an endeavour instructive?" To this question I would answer that by characterising the various role players (critics, readers, writers and the genre itself), Coleridge lifts a mirror to each in which to inspect themselves, and by doing so to better themselves, the propriety of the genre and the British literary canon as a whole. Like Bard Bracey, Coleridge hopes to cleanse the woods of British literature with this ballad. He hopes to silent the incessant utterings of the night-owls with his apocalyptic cockscrow, and by doing so save a British reading public from its own taste for the contrived and the vulgar, while saving a genre from the complacency of its writers.

In doing so, Coleridge does not, like the hysterical critics, merely degrade the Gothic, but as Richard Berkeley (with a notion introduced by Hogle (2005)) states, with "Christabel" Coleridge "massively out-gothics the Gothic" (2014:261). G.L. Little rightly contends that Coleridge, in "Christabel", "was attempting to rescue the merits of the Gothic romance from inanities" (1961:220). Though Little would see Coleridge attempting such an undertaking through the effect "of the preternatural" on "human innocence and passions" (1961:220), I believe that Coleridge also attempted to illustrate in verse (with regard to the seduction scene) that sensuality need not be displayed in vulgar detail without lessening the effect it has on the reader. Not only did he attempt to save the merits of Gothic romance through an allegory (itself shown earlier to be a venerable literary technique), which would see him utilising ancient symbols, names and places without divesting them of their original meaning, and by so doing mending one of the chief faults his contemporaries and indeed he himself identified in the Gothic: that of simulacra. Crucially, however, Coleridge did not allow his literary or political endeavours and the allegorical way in which they are showcased in the poem to interfere with it as a Gothic story. A reading such as the one proffered above would therefore illustrate that Coleridge instructs not only readers, writers and critics of the Gothic, nor only the genre itself, but that with "Christabel", though it may be a

fragment, he also instructs the many generations who have consequently made their own mark on the British literary canon.

## Conclusion

The title of this dissertation professes from the outset the basic thesis here contended; that in selected poems Coleridge utilises the Gothic as a mode of instruction. In the hopes of illustrating and indeed proving such a thesis, I have succinctly outlined the notion of the Gothic, its history, the responses it elucidated and its impact on the British literary canon in Chapter One.

In Chapter Two I proffered a rather unusual, though not wholly unfamiliar, interpretation of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, in which I aimed to not only indicate the instructive value of the poem and its various Gothic elements, but also what this instruction might entail. I have navigated between two schools of thought. The first sees the poem as a poetic representation or translation of the Christian doctrines of fall, penance and redemption (such as in Warren, Beer, Chayes and others), or that at the very least considers these notions to be foremost themes evident in the poem. The second sees the poem’s horrific preternatural reality as irreconcilable with most doctrines of the Christian faith, particularly the redemption promoted by the former, and would therefore defend the poem as an exercise of the imagination or as dramatizing other aspects which might have prompted Coleridge to write “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”.<sup>59</sup> In navigating thus, I have aimed at finding a specifically Coleridgean interpretation that reconciles to a degree aspects of these two schools of thought.

My hopes to identify and argue for a more historically informed and hopefully more writerly informed interpretation of the poem and its much debated moral, has led me to dedicate the greater part of the chapter to the identification of the nature of the instruction evident in the poem. Drawing largely from Barfield’s *What Coleridge Thought* (1971), as well as from Coleridge’s own prose works such as the *Biographia Literaria*, *Aids to Reflection*, *Table Talk*, letters and notebook entries, I proposed that the poem dramatizes to a great extent what I contend Coleridge held to be the Original Sin and the processes by which it is brought about and by which it may be countered. By illustrating the various misunderstandings perpetrated by the crew and the Mariner, I hoped also to delineate how their faulty Understanding helped inform in such misperceptions. The interpretation I proffer in Chapter Two therefore identifies apostasy as the Original Sin, as a consequence of which the Mariner and the crew suffer their preternatural ordeal and/or deaths. Apostasy in the Coleridgean sense, according to Barfield (drawing from Coleridge’s *Theory of Life*), entails the detachment of a discrete part from its source so that it becomes a separate individual will (a finite will) with separate self-consciousness. I have subsequently argued that the crew and the Mariner are so confounded by the new, dangerous, strange and even supernatural settings they encounter in the Antarctic and Pacific, that they utilise their faulty Understanding in

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<sup>59</sup> Such as the Slave Trade (Lee, 1998:675-700) and British colonial expansion (Rudolf, 2013:185-210).

creating speculative systems of explanation and belief in the hopes of relieving the ontological crisis brought about by these confounding settings and events. Apostasy in the Coleridgean sense is therefore based on the Understanding and human propensity to rely strongly on it as the rite through which human beings are diverted from the source, or the centre, which is God. I have subsequently argued for an interpretation that sees engaging in these processes and not the shooting of the Albatross, as the true crime committed by the Mariner and indeed the crew. Such an interpretation has been shown tentatively to reconcile traditional Christian theodicy with the seemingly contradictory and irreconcilable aspects identified and argued for by scholars such as Bostetter. These aspects are shown to be the death of the crew, the Mariner's unredeemed state, Life-in-Death and Death's dice game and the overall chaotic reality which some would argue are contradictory to and irreconcilable with the wise and loving God of Christian theology and the Bible, and which consequently effect the negation of the Warren school of thought's approach, which sees the poem as a classic tale of fall, penance and redemption.

Though it would seem that the reconciliation I propose to have made discredits the school of thought represented by Bostetter in favour of the ideas of scholars such as Warren and Beer, I believe that Warren and Beer somewhat oversimplify a complex philosopheme (or, again, principle of reasoning) which Coleridge communicates in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"; a philosopheme, and by implication a teleology, which permeates Coleridge's prose writings and which he constantly examined and re-examined until his death. Though aspects of the poem as a classic tale of fall, penance and redemption seem evident enough, scholars such as Warren and Beer appear only to focus on these notions in relation to the character and actions of the Mariner himself, as well as seemingly supportive symbols such as the sun, the moon and the rain. According to this tradition the Mariner effectuates his fall (symbolically or otherwise) through his capricious killing of the Albatross; as penance the Mariner castigates himself for his part in the crew's death, and experiences ensuing desperate loneliness, thirst, hunger and preternatural persecution; his redemption occurs when he blesses the water snakes, after which he is supernaturally rescued from his dire situation and returns home. All this would seem to tie in neatly with the moral the Mariner attaches to his story.

Drawing from Bostetter (1962), one might indeed think it is questionable whether the Mariner is truly redeemed if he is doomed to wander the earth and either tell his tale or bear intolerable internal pain. I have therefore proposed a reading that sees the Mariner as an unknowing and tragic prophet who does not have the ability to recognise the true nature of his and the crew's transgressions because of his continued reliance on the Understanding – the ordering-and-rule-making principle which I believe has misled the Mariner, the glosser and indeed many readers of the poem. I indicated that for Coleridge the Understanding and Fancy are faculties which have no access to *natura naturans* but which can only make sense of *natura naturata*. It is only through

Reason that the human mind can aim to comprehend the constituent powers quenched in their product which is *natura naturata*, or the parts of which phenomenal reality comprises. The Understanding has therefore been shown to be of little theological importance when compared to Reason, its importance attached largely to its status as a rather liminal faculty through which one may access Reason. Coleridge held that the Understanding can only be delivered to Reason by the Imagination. I subsequently argued that the redemption in the poem is not the Mariner's own, but rather that of the external and obligatory audience to his narrative. I have indicated that his obligatory<sup>60</sup> audience is identified *ab extra*, which, in conjunction with the Mariner's hypnotic narrative capabilities, implies divine design behind the events that transpired on his voyage as well as the consequent telling of his tale. The presence of such design implies that the Mariner is a prophet (unknown to himself) and that his requisite audience are individuals who possess, unlike him, the Imaginative capability to deliver their Understanding (hitherto the primary faculty through which they have formulated their own ontology and therefore also their teleology and, by implication, theology) up to Reason, a process of which the Mariner's tale is a catalyst. Yet, I have demonstrated the moral the Mariner attaches to his narrative to be a red-herring. It is a truth so general to Christian doctrine that one may very well relegate it to the realm of the rule-making, ordering faculty which is the Understanding. I have asserted that this moral would hardly leave an already Christian individual "sadder and wiser" because it is so conventional and generally accepted. One may respond to this argument that the Wedding-Guest is left sadder because he is sympathetic toward the "grey-beard Loon" (l. 15, 1834 version) and his horrible ordeal, and that he is left wiser because the Mariner's tale has terrifyingly reaffirmed the omnipotence of a God who shall wreak His wrath on those foolish enough to disobey the rules implicit in the conventional truism the Mariner attaches to his narrative. Though such a counter-supposition may be true insofar as one may assume the Mariner's tale to encourage sympathy, this counter-supposition in terms of the Wedding-Guest being left wiser for having something he as Christian would already accept as general truth so vividly confirmed, would not resonate very well with Coleridgean metaphysics, as it ignores a differentiation which is paramount to Coleridge's philosophy: it mistakes thoughts for thinking.

Drawing from Barfield (1971), I have indicated that for Coleridge thoughts stand to thinking as *natura naturata* stands to *natura naturans*. This implies that because Coleridge held that thinking is an act of which we are normally not conscious, though we are conscious of the product of the

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<sup>60</sup> The adjective "obligatory" is here applicable to both the Mariner and his audience. The Mariner's audience are indeed obligated to listen to his tale as they, as illustrated by the Wedding-Guest's susceptibility to entrancement (l. 15, 1834 version), cannot resist the Mariner's hypnotic (almost magnetic) narrative capability. The Mariner, it has been shown, acts under some external compulsion when relating his tale. This in conjunction with the notion that his audience is almost prophetically identified *ab extra* (ll. 589-591, 1834 version), leads one to conjecture that the Mariner does not select his audience himself, and that he is therefore not only obligated to tell his tale but to tell it to specific individuals.

act, which is thought, in a related way we might mistake the constituent forces behind the existence of *natura naturans* for the product in which it is quenched, which is *natura naturata*. The Mariner's moral is therefore a precept informed by *natura naturata*, constructed because of the Mariner's continual reliance upon the Understanding. This reliance sees him making sense of his ordeal and his curse (that of wandering around telling his story to specific individuals) by attaching to it a cause which is a generally accepted Christian truth. This cause holds that because God loves all the creatures he created equally, killing one goes against God and will therefore unleash upon the trespasser the fury incurred by such blatant disregard. The Mariner attempts to comprehend forces closed to the Understanding with the Understanding. The moral the Mariner attaches to his tale is therefore another, and perhaps the ultimate misunderstanding he perpetrates. It is so generally true that its applicability to his narrative seems to be equal to his and the crews' superstitious (and almost idolatrous) inference of the existence of non-actual supernatural characters such as the Polar Spirit, as well as their inference of the religious significance of the Albatross. He therefore attaches the moral to his tale as a means to soothe his ontologically-wracked mind, which seems incapable of accessing the realm of Reason. Accordingly, he, like those who would support the counter-supposition proffered above, seeks to go behind the chain of causality linking the phenomena he witnessed by utilising his Understanding; but the Understanding cannot go behind phenomena which are, in fact, the ultimate constituents and cause of phenomenal reality.

In Chapter Two I have thus argued (to reiterate) that the Mariner's obligatory audiences are selected *ab extra* because they possess the ability to access the Imagination so as to deliver objects or events of phenomenal reality up to Reason. Having heard the Mariner's narrative, they, unlike the Mariner, have the ability to identify and comprehend the exact nature of his crime – apostasy, through utter reliance on the Understanding, which leads to superstitious perception and idolatry. His tale is therefore a catalyst which allows a chosen audience to peer through the mists and darkness of Coleridge's famous parable in the *Biographia Literaria* (2004:60) to which I have referred in Chapter Two. The catalysis his tale (and the philosopheme therein propounded) effectuates allows the Mariner's predestined audience knowledge of ultimate phenomena, of the centre of creation, of God. Their perceptions are premised on Reason. They are accordingly transformed, and are able to break from the realm of transcendent speculation into the realm of transcendental reasoning. This transcendental reasoning, as Chayes (1965:88) indicates, allows them to “penetrate that which lies on the other side of natural consciousness”, so as to gain knowledge of and rightfully practice “that which is spiritual in man”. In other words, the Mariner's audience can acknowledge the true nature of his crime, which I have argued is apostasy centred in reliance on the Understanding. This crime, and the notion that the Wedding-Guest has the ability to see it for what it truly is, is very much in accordance with Coleridge's differentiation between transcendent and transcendental speculation argued in Chapter XII in the *Biographia*.

Chayes' summarizes Coleridge's differentiation: transcendent speculation is essentially lawless while transcendental speculation is "limited and controlled" (1965:85). Drawing from Coleridge's thoughts of (lower order) mystics and mysticism as expressed in *Aids to Reflection*, Chayes rightly identifies the uncanny similarities between Coleridge's transcendent philosopher and his philosophy expressed in Chapter XII of the *Biographia*, and the Mariner. Both infer ultimate truths from what are essentially speculative and even idiosyncratic beliefs and experiences. In *Aids to Reflection*, Coleridge presents a parable of two different individuals separated from their caravan whilst trekking through the desert (1884:194). The first can see only by the dim light of his lamp, as a consequence of which "true memories of his experience are mingled with the products of fancy and dream, and his account is received 'as a madman's tale'" (Chayes, 1965:86). He is the lower-order mystic. The second purveys and navigates the scene by soft moonlight, which is "the imaginative poesy of nature, [which] spreads its soft shadowy charm over all and gives to all objects a tender visionary hue and softening" (Chayes, 1965:86). Chayes goes on to show that should one "interpret the moonlight and the shadows as the peculiar genius of the individual's own spirit", one would arrive at a conception of the higher-order mystic, "an Enthusiast of a nobler breed" (1965:86).

Returning to Chapter XII of the *Biographia*, we see that Coleridge introduces this chapter with reference to the reading of philosophical works in general, and specifically to a hypothetical reading of the work of a religious fanatic:

In the perusal of philosophical works I have been greatly benefited by a resolve, which, in the antithetic form and with the allowed quaintness of an adage or maxim, I have been accustomed to word thus: until you understand a writer's ignorance, presume yourself ignorant of his understanding. [...] I have now before me a treatise of a religious fanatic, full of dreams and supernatural experiences. I see clearly the writer's grounds, and their hollowness. I have a complete insight into the causes, which through the medium of his body has acted on his mind; and by application of received and ascertained laws I can satisfactorily explain to my own reason all the strange incidents, which the writer records of himself. And this I can do without suspecting him of any intentional falsehood. As when in broad day-light a man tracks the steps of a traveller, who had lost his way in a fog or by a treacherous moonshine, even so, and with the same tranquil sense of certainty, can I follow the traces of this bewildered visionary. I understand his ignorance.

(2004:58)

Recalling Chapter Two of this dissertation, and indeed the recapitulation above, I believe the evidence to be sufficient to justify the identification of the philosopheme I have identified in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". However, I by no means proffer that this is the only, and ultimate philosopheme or instructive project evident in the poem. Reading the excerpt above it is

remarkable that Coleridge's maxim for the reading of philosophical treatises mirrors what I have argued to be the Wedding-Guest's and other chosen audiences' reactions to the Mariner's tale. The Wedding-Guest understands the Mariner's ignorance and is therefore not ignorant of his understanding. The Wedding-Guest realises, upon contemplation (for is it not on the following morn which he rises sadder and wiser?) that the Mariner is ignorant of his own tale and therefore also his trespasses. The Mariner and his tale are therefore like the treatise of the religious fanatic to which Coleridge refers above. My argument for the processes by which the Mariner apostatises has shown that he, like Coleridge's religious fanatic, misunderstands "the causes which, through the medium of his body have acted on his mind". The Mariner and the crew's minds and separate Wills are therefore guided by the Understanding, where the confounding phenomenal world of the Antarctic and Pacific has acted on their minds so as to make them theorise about the causes of the terrifying events unfolding around them. Such speculation I have shown to be key to their apostasy, as they, like the religious fanatic above, ascribe the causes to hollow supernatural beings inferred from dreams (such as the Polar Spirit and the two voices) and seemingly coherent chains of causality (the events after the shooting of the Albatross).

But, the predestined audience, unlike the Mariner, possess the imaginative capability, or the "philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition", which Coleridge in the *Biographia* regards as rare in most people (2004:59-60). They possess the philosophic consciousness that for Coleridge lies beneath "the spontaneous consciousness natural to all reflecting beings" (2004:59). Doubtlessly, despite his often debasing self-examination, Coleridge would have held that he too possessed this "philosophic imagination"; for if he did not why would he deem the philosophic products of his intellect fit for publication? Indeed, in the excerpt above he contends that he can interpret the supernatural tale of a religious fanatic, the "philosophic consciousness" being prerequisite to such an interpretation, and therefore also the claim made. Like Coleridge, the Wedding-Guest and other predestined audiences to the Mariner's narrative have the ability to track "in broad day-light [...] the steps of a traveller, who had lost his way in a fog or by a treacherous moonshine" and with "tranquil sense of certainty, follow the traces of this bewildered visionary" (2004:58). The selected audience can therefore understand the Mariner's ignorance through their innate "philosophic consciousness", which by means of Reason allows them to see past the mists and phantasms of the Mariner's narrative, identify these as products of a Will guided by the Understanding, and in doing so see the Mariner's folly. I therefore believe the Mariner's narrative to be an imaginative catalyst that activates the innate "philosophical consciousness" and Reason in chosen individuals and makes it the principle means by which these individuals construct a new episteme, ontology, teleology and by implication a new, philosophically sound Christian theology. In this theology the cornerstones of the faith, such as Original Sin, the Fall, Penance and Redemption are demythologised to some extent, allowing for a truer metaphysical understanding of them, and therefore a truer philosophical underpinning for the faith. The

supernatural, mytho-poetic narrative the Mariner tells therefore leaves them wiser and sadder. Sadder because they may sympathise with the Mariner in that he cannot recognise his own ignorance, and wiser because of the paradigm shifting implications of the philosopheme and the wisdom which it conveys.

Here the reader may quite justifiably object that I ignore the gloss (added in 1817) and its acceptance of incidents and characters which I contend are products of and misunderstandings perpetrated by the Mariner's (and the crew's) reliance on the Understanding. Furthermore, because I impose Coleridge's metaphysical and philosophical musings published some time after the composition of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", some may lay the charge of anachronism at my door. In Chapter Two I have intimated, drawing on Coleridge's letters and from "The Garden of Boccaccio", that he later translated (to a certain extent) his metaphysical and philosophical musings evident in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", and indeed in "The Destiny of Nations", "The Aeolian Harp" and other poems, into prose in works such as the *Biographia Literaria*, *Aids to Reflection*, *Table Talk* and *The Statesman's Manual*. As to the first charge I believe that it is evident that the glosser either hopes to explain in more modern English the events unfolding in the poem or that he does not possess the "philosophic consciousness" which I argue is evident in the Wedding-Guest.

Rudolf believes that the glosser is part of the countless retellings and consequent modifications of the ballad, which imply a multiple authorship (2013:186). Prior to Rudolf critics such as Jerome McGann (1981) (and yet still others before him) have intimated at this multiplicity. McGann identifies the glosser as a seventeenth- or early eighteenth century scholar and antiquarian who provides the reader with interpretive and interpreted information, thus presenting the text as more authentic by imitating a textual history (1981:41). Twitchell, despite his rather forced interpretation of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as a vampire poem, does offer some keen insights into the gloss and its critical heritage. He indicates that, although the gloss may have been added by Coleridge in the hopes of making the poem seem "older, more realist and Christian", scholars such as Empson and Pirie deem it an unnecessary addition to the poem. He further believes that seeing as the gloss was added by the older, more orthodox, Trinitarian Coleridge, the poet made the addition in order to "repair the excesses of youth" (1977:28). McQueen reacts to arguments which hold that the fictional glosser is pious and hopes to Christianise the poem, by stating that it is quite the opposite; that the glosser aims to rationalise and vitiate the supernatural occurrences in the poem. Debateable as such an opinion is, McQueen admits that the gloss does aid in placing the poem in a Christian framework (2014:29).

Given the varied opinions above, I believe that the gloss does illustrate a feigned multiple authorship, because it seeks to imitate the literary convention which sees antiquarians and/or

scholars imposing an explanation on ancient texts either for the convenience of their modern readers or simply as interpretations; a convention which was very popular during the time Coleridge added the gloss. Interestingly, as I have indicated in the first chapter of this dissertation, Horace Walpole applies the same “technique” with the publication of the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto*. Walpole, however, claimed to be but a translator and any interpretation which he imposes on the supposedly thirteenth century text is found in the introduction to the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto* and not in an in-text gloss. Some readers of the poem have mistakenly, I believe, construed the gloss to be Coleridge’s own words, which aim to clarify some of the more opaque instances of a poem which is still today considered to be at times vague.

I propose that the gloss was added to feign an historicist air, but that it was added in such a way as to illustrate the errors made when an ancient text is retold and reinterpreted numerous times over numerous generations. It offers the reader a palimpsestic vantage point from which to view the historical development and canonisation of the semiotics of an ancient text, where consequent generations impose meaning onto it, to the point where the development of its semiotics is far removed from the initial purposes behind its writing, and whereby the true meaning of the text is obscured by numerous overlays. Yet, Harding indicates that Coleridge also held the opposite to be true (2012:509-512). Harding explains that Coleridge held the notion of “involution” as pivotal to the interpretation of mythological narratives and the prophecies of the New Testament. “Involution”, explains Harding, entails that the meaning of mythological narrative or New Testament prophecy “is only partially understood at first, but as an individual or community continues to reflect on and reinterpret the sense, a fuller meaning begins to disclose itself” (ibid., 512). This would see the process which I described above, the process which through various redactions over time increase the opacity of a mytho-poetic narrative or prophecy, reversed, in that various redactions may bring subsequent generations nearer to an understanding of the narrative or prophecy. Of these two processes, the first centrifugal and the second centripetal, I believe the Wedding-Guest to represent the latter and the glosser the first. The glosser therefore does not have access to a “philosophical consciousness” and thus to Reason. He is subsequently, like the Mariner, led by the Understanding and consequently perpetrates many misperceptions, including his unfounded claims to the actuality of supernatural characters such as the Polar Spirit and the two voices, as well as his most unfounded claim that the Albatross is indeed holy. The Wedding-Guest, however, I have aimed to show, grasps the philosopheme which the poem communicates. Curiously, he does not tell the reader, nor the Mariner or glosser what this entails. I believe its untellability is mirrored by Coleridge’s inability to communicate the philosopheme, and some of its constituent notions such as Reason and Imagination, translucently in prose works such as the *Biographia*, *Aids to Reflection* and *Table Talk*. Nonetheless, I hope my interpretation to be centripetal and that the historical approach on which I have leaned so heavily to aid my work

is involuntal and not evolutional to the study of the philosophical and theological pedagogy evident in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”.

In Chapter Three I proposed a reading which sees “Christabel” as an allegory which dramatizes the then current British literary sphere’s encounter with the Gothic. The interpretation I have offered has rather less to do with the complex Coleridgean metaphysics, philosophy and theology than in my interpretation of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”. I hope therefore that the reader may pardon the relative brevity of the recapitulation of Chapter Three (relative to the one above), which follows. The numerous (numerous because of the nature of Coleridge’s often self-contradictory theories) contestations which may be made against my interpretation of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” have, however, forced me to offer counter-arguments and evidence which by their complex nature hardly allow for stringent word economy. Interpreting “Christabel”, though, as an allegorical dramatization of forces abroad in the contemporary British literary sphere does not require the same lengthy explications.

The interpretation offered in Chapter Three relies heavily on Coleridge’s literary critique particularly evident in his reviews of the novels of Radcliffe and Monk Lewis. I have further relied heavily on other examples of Coleridge’s criticism evident in prose works such as the *Biographia Literaria* and his lectures and letters, and on various readings and criticism the poem has garnered in the twentieth- and twenty first centuries. I have therefore aimed, as with my interpretation of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, to lean towards a historically and biographically informed writerly interpretation. With such an approach, together with my (and others’) close reading of the poem, I wished to move toward an interpretation of validated writerly intent so as to identify how and what exactly Coleridge hopes to impart with the writing of the poem. Though close reading has waned in popularity, I feel it is a meaningful and necessary reaction against the various “–isms” and literary theories which over the last three or four decades have been used to approach the poem, not always as tools with which to unlock new elements and interests in Coleridge’s poetry, but which rather use Coleridge’s poetry as a tool with which to illustrate aspects of theory and the theoretical prowess of various authors (some of whom cherry pick from Coleridge’s oeuvre so as to historically substantiate their claims). Considering my intentions, I hope I have not made myself guilty of that of which I accuse others.

Aspiring to identify Coleridge’s instructive purpose behind the writing of “Christabel”, my interpretation heavily relies on Coleridge’s own knowledge of symbolism and the historical nature of certain symbols, etymology, mythology (from Norse to Greek), and of then current literary problems. I do, however, believe that I have made no wholly unsubstantiated inferences, and where the claim of strained identification of various sources behind characters, settings and symbols may be made, the same charges may be laid against other scholars who have elucidated

the sources of “Christabel”, such as Nethercot (1939) and Lowes (1927). However, such charges are perhaps inevitable when one attempts to do research on the writings of a self-confessed “library cormorant”.

Despite these various possible contestations, I have, by interpreting “Christabel” as an allegory flush with symbolism, hoped to illustrate that Coleridge aims to instruct the various participants of the often guilty British literary encounter with the Gothic on aspects on which he might think they need instruction. By utilising Coleridge’s own, as well as his contemporaries’, writings, together with more recent research on Gothic literature, I have hoped to illustrate that certain characters are personifications of various participants in the then current literary sphere. Sir Leoline has therefore been shown to represent the patriarchal, gate-keeping literary critics or men of letters. Christabel has been shown to not only be a bricolage of the essential characteristics of the Radcliffian heroine, but also of the British reading public who suffer under the stringent constraints which the Law of the father imposes upon them. I have intimated that she may also be construed as an allegorical representation of British literature, which I have argued may have suffered under patriarchal law. In such an interpretation Geraldine allegorically represents the Gothic as genre. Relying heavily on Nethercot’s *The Road to Tryermaine* (1939), I have illustrated that although she may at first seem wholly villainous, it is evident (both intra- and extra- textually) that she acts under the power of some external compulsion. This compulsion, in allegorical terms, has been identified as the inferior writers of Gothic literature Coleridge scorned. The beautiful Geraldine’s seduction of the innocent Christabel dramatizes not only the British readership’s encounter with Gothic fiction, but also British literature’s encounter with the genre. It has been shown that Coleridge did not deem the Gothic wholly vile and that this allegorical seduction also dramatizes Coleridge’s belief that this guilty encounter with the sensational Gothic, will see the British readership and British literature shift from naive innocence to informed virtuousness. I believe that Coleridge saw his instructive Gothic project in “Christabel” as one of the means by which such a transformation may be effectuated.

The interpretation of the Gothic elements in both poems sees Coleridge conversing with the genre by adhering to and transcending many of its almost formulaic conventions. Relying on the works of modern researchers of the Gothic, such as Williams, Hogle, Ellis and Townshend, I have arrived at the present interpretation. With the aid of this well-researched and accessible corpus, I have looked at the conventions, development, aesthetics and critical heritage of the Gothic in such a way as to come to an understanding of the motivations and techniques behind the Gothic elements in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel”. Not only this, but the work of these scholars also affords the researcher of Coleridge’s Gothic crucial historical, psychological, literary, sociological and even economic backgrounds against which inclusively to view not only Coleridge’s poetic Gothic productions, but also the anti-Gothic commentary he makes in his

numerous prose publications. By utilising the work of these contemporary authors, and by utilising older criticism on the poems at hand, I have aimed not only to present the reader with what I hold to be Coleridge's respective instructive projects in these poems nor to merely indicate how Coleridge converses with the Gothic, but to also present the reader with the critical heritage these poems have garnered as well as to re-present ideas and criticism which, because of modern criticism's seeming obsession with what is new, may have fallen out of the field of vision of contemporary researchers.

It is my conviction that Coleridge not only hopes to instruct the various role-players of the British literary sphere, but that through his execution of "Christabel" he hopes to illustrate the propitious aspects of the genre and to also rectify the main charges made against it so as to instruct the writers and readers thereof to its proper execution. As I have indicated in the previous chapter, Coleridge deemed it his duty to improve the Gothic and to save its salutary aspects from the grips of sordid and ineffectual authors; failure to do so, Coleridge held (evident from his review of *The Monk*), would make him an accomplice to the moral and literary deterioration of British literature. Such an improving mission would see him rectifying general charges made against Gothic literature.<sup>61</sup> Charges such as licentiousness are therefore rectified in the instance which sees the absence of voyeuristic detail in Geraldine and Christabel's sexual encounter. I have also aimed to illustrate that Coleridge aspires to rectify the charge that Gothic literature is, or heavily relies on, twice removed simulacra by utilising ancient symbols and names without divesting them of their original meaning and semantic potency. In so doing Coleridge is in the unique position of being both outside and inside the genre, which allows for its rectification as well as objective criticism and therefore instruction of the various participants and literary investments of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century British literary sphere.

Doubtlessly, there are aspects shared by these poems; if this was not the case there would be little logic in constructing a whole dissertation around them. The shared aspects on which I chose to focus are the poems' Gothic elements and their instructive purposes. I have consequently investigated these poems so as to identify the specific instruction, or merely one instructive project

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<sup>61</sup> Another charge which could be made against the interpretation of "Christabel" as an allegorically instructive Gothic poem is Coleridge's seeming distrust and denigration of allegory when compared to symbols, especially evident in *The Statesman's Manual*. To such charges I would respond that although Coleridge deemed allegory to be subordinate to symbols (the first being a construct of fancy whilst the second emanates from Reason and the Imagination so as to be consubstantial with its referent thereby effecting its status in the eternal I AM (Halmi, 2012:393-394)), he might have purposefully opted for allegory (a hackneyed convention of British Gothic literature) in a poem which sees him practically improving the Gothic by rectifying aspects of it which he found most apprehensible. How Coleridge may aim to achieve such a goal as pertains to "Christabel" would certainly garner a great many possible answers, and perhaps still more questions, but I believe he does so by imbuing his allegorical poem with rich symbolism and also by presenting the reader with an allegory in which the characters do not only act in allegorical fashion, but also as human beings under supernatural agency.

(as others may argue that there are more), Coleridge hoped to communicate in these Gothic poems. Thus far, I have relied on the reader to understand the terms “instruction” and “pedagogy” in their most general sense; educative information on how things should be done and the methods such instruction entails. A pedagogical method common to “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel” is something resembling case-based learning and problem-based learning, but in a negative sense. Negative, because readers are not represented with an actual case or problem which they are to resolve utilising knowledge they have accrued; rather, they are presented with characters who, if their folly and the consequences thereof are correctly identified, may act as an example of what not to do. This is especially true of the Mariner and his apostasy, and of Sir Leoline and his boorish, almost incarceratory treatment of “Christabel”. With “Christabel”, Coleridge also aims at a creative correction of the principal faults of the Gothic. “Christabel” as Gothic poem would therefore also be instructive, in being a touchstone by which to judge other Gothic works of literature.

In “Christabel”, Coleridge mainly aims to instruct his contemporaries; individuals and/or groups such as contemporary late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century writers of Gothic fiction, readers, critics and poets who all played a part in the British literary sphere’s earliest encounters with the popular Gothic. Accordingly, Coleridge allegorises the literary stakeholders in “Christabel”, and has them imaginatively play out their various roles. Coleridge thus presents a mirror to the then current British literary sphere by which the various participants cannot only identify their folly, but also in some cases (like Geraldine’s and Christabel’s) come to sympathise with those against whom they are so viciously opposed. Such a reading coincides with Coleridge’s later writings on allegory where Halmi, quoting from the *Lay Sermons*, shows that Coleridge held allegory to be “but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses” (2012:396). Allegory, as shown in Chapter One, was important to the eighteenth century revival of the Gothic in British literature, a fact evidenced by Ellis’ writings on Hurd and Warton (2000:26). Not only was the Gothic, because of its un-Englishness, a rather safe place in which to make controversial social, religious and political critiques, but so too did allegory allow for the relative safety of the author. Accordingly, Coleridge utilises in “Christabel” the Gothic convention of translating abstract ideas into picture-language, but he does it in such a way that should the poem be read by an individual with no historical knowledge of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century British literature, the poem would still retain its intrigue and charm. “Christabel” accordingly instructs by example. Thereby with “Christabel”, the more traditionally Gothic of the two poems I have investigated, Coleridge does not only presented his poetry as the Gothic’s favourable aesthetic alternative, as argued by Townshend and Wright (2016:6), but he presents “Christabel” as a supremely aesthetic Gothic alternative to the aesthetically tawdry nature of the popular Gothic.

The instructive philosopheme evident in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” has a more universal applicability than that in “Christabel”. Whereas “Christabel” deals, to a large extent, with very specific literary problems, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” attempts to instruct its reader, like the Wedding-Guest, on the various metaphysical and theological aspects discussed above. The key question, once more, is why Coleridge would opt for a genre largely deemed vulgar and base by his contemporaries, and even in some instances by himself, in which to communicate his instruction on such “high” philosophical and theological principles.

There are many reasons which may explain why Coleridge opts for a “low” genre. Holmes reveals that *Lyrical Ballads* was at first conceived as a way in which Coleridge and Wordsworth hoped to generate money for a tour of Germany (2005:187). As illustrated previously, the Gothic certainly did offer a means of financial gain for many of its authors. However, if this were the initial reason as to why Coleridge offered instruction through these Gothic poems, why would he imbue the poems with such lofty ideals? One may argue that he aimed at suffusing instruction in these poems so as to settle a guilty conscience originating in the writing of Gothic literature for financial gain. However, if we knew (as argued by the dissertation) that the thoughts about which Coleridge instructs us through these poems were thoughts which would permeate his later prose works, I believe such a notion would soon fall out of favour.

As a reviewer of many Gothic romances, Coleridge was aware of the wide readership the Gothic enjoyed. The preface to *Lyrical Ballads* confesses its use of an experiment “to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure”, whilst it also attacks “the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers” (Damrosch *et al*, 2010:373). However, in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel” Coleridge attempts to show not only how the “language and conversation of the lower and middle classes of society” can lead to “poetic pleasure”, but how the common literary diet of the middle and lower classes of society may also be adapted for the purposes of poetic instruction. It instructs, however, not only the readers, but also, through rectification, “the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers”. As illustrated previously, Hogle indicates that by 1795 the genre to which we today refer as the Gothic, had already captured thirty eight per cent of the British literature market (2005:21). It is understandable, therefore, that Coleridge would have utilised the Gothic as a mode of instruction, because its popularity ensured a voluminous readership. The Gothic accordingly offered Coleridge a unique popular textual environment in which he could instruct the masses on subjects on which he felt they needed instruction. As indicated in Chapter One, this is a trait of the Gothic which both Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin authors also exploited, and this in an age and country in which, as Coleridge holds in the *Biographia Literaria*, “disquisitions on all subjects, not privileged to adopt technical terms or scientific symbols, must be addressed to the Public” (2004:59). I subsequently contended that Coleridge

did address his disquisitions and pedagogical project in these poems (although “Christabel” was only first published in 1816, it did circulate in manuscript)<sup>62</sup> in a genre that was specifically a popular and therefore public genre. This notion is supported by the fact that both poems are ballads, a form of verse which in its history and tradition is essentially popular and sometimes educative.

The historical reasons as to why Coleridge opted for the Gothic as a mode of instruction, though valid, are by no means the only reasons. Coleridge, as we know from Holmes, had an inveterate appreciation for romance, which started as soon as he was able to read. Not only did he have an undying passion for romance, he also valued its instructive potential. Nethercot quotes from a series of autobiographical letters which Coleridge wrote to his good friend and neighbour, Thomas Poole (1939:186-187). In one of these letters Coleridge writes:

For from my early reading of fairy tales and genii, etc. etc., my mind had been habituated to *the Vast*, and I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions, not by my *sight*, even at that age. Should children be permitted to read romances, and relations of giants and magicians, and genii? I know all that has been said against it, but I have formed my faith in the affirmative. I know of no other way of giving the love of the Whole and the Great [...].

(1939:186-187)

This excerpt proves that Coleridge sees the specifically educative value of romance. The fact that he wrote the letter during the time which saw the composition of “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel”, attests to the notion that these innovative Gothic poems were conceived as vehicles of instruction. This would also explain why aspects of Coleridge’s later prose are evident in these poems. A philosopheme, writes Halmi, is “a proto-philosophical meaning that could [never] have been expressed otherwise” (2012:397). “Never” is perhaps too long a time, and it is evident that Coleridge expressed the philosopheme(s) and therefore the instructive purposes evident in these poems (which at the time of first composing them he may have found impossible) in later philosophical prose works<sup>63</sup>.

Given the above, it is evident that romance, and Gothic romance in particular, was not only a popular genre which many used for instructive purposes, but also a genre which Coleridge,

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<sup>62</sup> Swann says that Coleridge met with prospective publishers of “Christabel” who wanted to publish the poem in a most lavish guinea volume (1985:397). However, writing to his wife on the matter, Coleridge indicated that he would much “rather [...] have it printed at Soulby’s on the true Ballad Paper”. From this Swann intimates that “Coleridge stands on his literary principles: a ballad is a popular form, and it would be politically and aesthetically inappropriate to publish one in a guinea volume” (ibid.). This instance therefore testifies that Coleridge was well aware of the populist characteristics of his Gothic ballad.

<sup>63</sup> It may be argued that even in his later philosophical prose Coleridge struggled to communicate some aspects of his metaphysics and philosophy.

despite his various criticisms of certain compositions belonging to the genre, deemed to be perfectly apt for the conveyance of instruction. The Gothic as a mode of instruction sees Coleridge, in plain English, sugaring the pill with the excitement and exoticism promised by the genre. He accordingly corrects a genre by taming its *dulce* with significant *utile*. It is evident from his comprehension of the contemporary literary problems raised by the Gothic, that Coleridge had a unique understanding of the constituent powers behind the popular genre. In “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel”, Coleridge does therefore not use Fancy and the Understanding to merely arrange events, settings and characters in such a way as to generate cheap readerly excitement, thereby reproducing countless lifeless simulacra. Unlike most late eighteenth- and early nineteenth century authors and reviewers of the Gothic, he peers through the veils and mists which obscure its true potential. Unlike many of the reviewers, Coleridge could see aspects of the Gothic which are beautiful, propitious and valuable (such as its instructive potential); unlike most of the contemporary authors of Gothic romances, Coleridge could see the potential of the genre when imaginatively transformed. Accordingly Coleridge’s treatment of the Gothic, as both a mode of instruction and a genre in need of correction, sees him dissolving, diffusing and dissipating aspects thereof in order to imaginatively recreate, in these poems, a genre which would benefit immensely from such revitalisation.

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