



Research Article

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**All of This Has Happened Before:  
Eternal Return in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** The myth of eternal return has been a recurring theme in various mythologies of various cultures throughout the world. It has been a way, for the archaic people, to construe the world they live in. The significance of the eternal time that replenishes itself and renews the universe has been a ray of hope for the people who sought after a meaning for their lives and deaths. Instead of a linear, chronological timeline where everything happens once and for all, eternal return calls for the re-enactment and re-actualization of the deeds of gods or mythical beings to incur their spirits to bless, or guide people. Nietzsche's take on the concept is quite different as he deems this recurrent existence nihilistic and tries to find a way out of this labyrinth. His solution for as well as his predicament in becoming the Superman is this rhetorical cyclical existence. Coleridge's tour de force "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" embodies the concept of eternal return and the eternal recurrence of the same perfectly. The ancient mariner's long life and superhuman powers are testaments to his superhuman existence. His repetitive reiteration of his story therefore, is his re-enactment of the same event over and over in an attempt to transcend it in a Zarathustran fashion. The aim of this essay, therefore, is to analyse "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in terms of Eliadean and Nietzschean versions of eternal return and to show how by rising above this recurrent and cyclical existence the ancient mariner rises as a Superman.

**Keywords:** Eternal return, eternal recurrence, Romanticism, Nietzsche, Mircea Eliade, S. T. Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

The "incalculable magic[al]" power of "The Rime" is largely based upon the symbolic language which is wrought with the elements of eternal return (Untermeyer 219). The language, which draws the reader into the magical reality of the Ancient Mariner in a state of trance, engraves itself into memory through vivid images. As

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Coleridge claims in the advertisement of 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, “‘The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere’ was professedly written in imitation of the style, as well as of the spirit of the elder poets; but with a few exceptions, the Author believes that the language adopted in it has been equally intelligible for these three last centuries” (2004, 8). The style mentioned here is that of the old ballad form, albeit with a few changes, as it was the wont of Romantics. As the ballad form makes use of symbolic language as a source of musicality, it fits the ends Coleridge tried to achieve in “The Rime” perfectly.

The recurrent nature of the poem, ensured by the implication that the mariner constantly recounts it in uncertain intervals, is best described in the anecdote Coleridge shared in *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge writes that in a meeting an amateur performer in verse claimed to have written an epigram on “The Rime” which turned out to be what he had written in the *Morning Post* himself. The words of the epigram clearly reveal the cyclical properties of the poem through one of Coleridge’s favourite symbols: the ouroboros:

Your poem must eternal be,  
Dear sir! It cannot fail,  
For ‘tis incomprehensible  
And without head or tail. (Coleridge, *Biographia* 15)

Coleridge’s return to the ancients can be regarded as an attempt to free the mariner from the shackles of the “whole millennia of labyrinth” enforced by the moral compass of Christianity (Nietzsche 2005, 34). His need to step away from the labyrinth, despite his pious nature, can be seen as an effort to achieve through the mariner what he could not himself. Morality here, having lost its viability, “has no sanction any more and hence ends in nihilism” (Löwith 51). This struggle can be best seen in his notes regarding the “Ancient Mariner” in his *Table Talk*. According to Coleridge “the fault of the Ancient Mariner consists in making the moral sentiment too apparent and bringing it in too much as a principle or cause in a work of such pure Imagination” (Coleridge 2004, 98). As obvious in the quotation above, Coleridge considers morality to be a hindrance in the way of imagination. With its rules and dogmas, morality encumbers the free play of imagination, thus obstructing the meaning and magic the poem is trying to convey. In the second note in the same entry of the *Table Talk* Coleridge further illustrates the issue of morality in respect to the comments of Anna Laetitia Barbauld:

Mrs Barbauld told me that the only faults she found with the Ancient Mariner were — that it was improbable and had no moral. As for the probability — to be sure that might admit some question — but I told her that in my judgment the poem had moral, and that too openly obtruded on the reader. It ought to have no more moral than the story of the merchant sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well and throwing the shells aside, and the Genii starting up and saying he must kill the merchant, because a date shell had put out the eye of the Genii’s son. (2004, 98)

The second criticism Coleridge had to defend the mariner against that came from Wordsworth further establishes the improbable and incomprehensible magic the mariner had upon people. In the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth added a note to “The Ancient Mariner” in which he finds four cardinal faults in the poem:

The Poem of my Friend has indeed great defects; first, 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 controul 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. (276) (emphasis mine)

The defects found here directly relate to the character of the mariner, who having been under the effects of the supernatural events, became something supernatural himself, in other words, Wordsworth expects someone distinctive in order for him to become supernatural. However, the point of the mariner is precisely that he does not stand above the rest, and what Wordsworth misses in this respect is that the events happen to an ordinary man, and they have the power to change even the seemingly most ordinary person into what the mariner

is. True, the mariner is not distinctive in his personality; he is no different from the “four times fifty living men” (line 216) that die at the behest of death, but this, instead of diminishing, increases the dramatic effect that such an Everyman should become supernatural. The second objection that “he does not act, but is constantly acted upon” actually shows the powerlessness and helplessness of man against the supernatural powers found in nature (276). However, this inaction is precisely significant, as the mariner, feeling stifled by the constant passivity acts on his own will when he kills the Albatross. Thus, this single act of taking the control is the definitive moment of his transformation. The third objection is directly related to Wordsworth’s acceptance of causality. Since the events of “The Ancient Mariner” are not constructed upon the traditional understanding of cause and effect / crime and punishment, for people who accept the causal correlation it becomes unacceptable and seems like a fault. The last objection loses its validity when it is seen in the light of the relation between the poem and the circumstances leading to the imagery. As Coleridge bantered in a later note, it was reported that “the greater part of the Lyrical Ballads had been sold to seafaring men, who having heard of the Ancient Mariner, concluded that it was a naval song-book, or, at all events that it had some relation to nautical matters” (275). As Professor Lowes’ research of the origins of “The Ancient Mariner” and “Kubla Khan” in *The Road to Xanadu* clearly shows, Coleridge’s use of imagery is not laborious; on the contrary it flows smoothly and feels natural that a mariner uses that kind of imagery (54).

Karl Kroeber places the “Mariner’s essential humanity” at the centre of a “natural world [that is] animated by superhuman spiritual creatures” (180). In his article, he suggests that the “verbal witchery and ‘archetypal’ significance” of the poem owe much to its epic qualities (179). By introducing the poem through a narrator, which shadows Coleridge’s voice, and leaving the stage to the ancient mariner until the very end, Coleridge managed to distance himself from the poem, leaving the reader face to face with the mariner, just as the wedding guest. It is almost impossible to shrug off the engrossing effect of the poem because just as the mariner holds the wedding guest “with his glittering eye,” he holds the reader with his “verbal witchery.” Since Coleridge’s voice can be heard very little, the spell is unbroken. By giving voice to the narrator only at the beginning, the last stanza and a couple of more lines in the story, Coleridge makes the reader subject to the mariner’s will as well. The voice is no longer the narrator’s or Coleridge’s, but the mariner’s.

The mariner’s disgusting appearance is highlighted when he holds the wedding guest physically. The wedding guest can easily shrug him off, showing the mariner’s physical weakness. The choice of words is significant here; he is not old, he is ancient. His claim to have been “the first that ever burst / Into that silent sea” (lines 105–106) must mean that “his trip predates Magellan’s circumnavigation of the globe in 1519-22” (Coleridge 2004, 66). This antiquity is significant when Coleridge’s interest in *The Wandering Jew* and *Cain* is taken into consideration as Professor Lowes clearly outlines in his study. The mariner, just like the *Wandering Jew* and *Cain*, is charged with wandering the earth recounting his tale to people and “by his own example” teaching “love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth” (Coleridge 2000, 67). His age renders him physically weak, which according to Wordsworth, makes him undistinguished in his features, but it also gives him psychic powers, which places him above normal humans, on a supernatural plane. At the very beginning of the poem, making the wedding guest refuse his physical attempts to make him listen to the story is a very subtle way of distinguishing him from regular humans, which proves Wordsworth’s claim wrong. What makes the mariner’s tale mythic, in the sense that it is “experienced by the whole man”, is that it is different from the “‘private mythologies’” of the modern man, which “never rise[s] to the ontological status of myths because it “transforms a particular situation into a situation that is paradigmatic” (Eliade 1959, 211).

As far as causality is concerned, the ancient mariner believes shooting the Albatross to be the cause of his curse, and the torments he went through. However, if it were so, this would mean there is a break in the causal cycle as at the beginning of the journey since the mariner and the other crew did nothing wrong to be driven to the South Pole. This shows that Coleridge did not believe in a causal chain of events, which would make the shooting of the albatross an event significant on its own without a causal link to past events. The moment he shoots the Albatross is the “gateway moment” Nietzsche’s Zarathustra experiences. It is both the time of the “high noon” and “great distress” for the mariner (Nietzsche 2003, 126). It is when he decides to accept life as it is and everything in life to be free of causality or to be stuck in the clutches of a nihilistic questioning of the event as the cause of his curse. He relives the events of his life over and over again every time he recounts the tale and he goes through the same nihilistic existential problem every time. Since he cannot get out of the

clutches of the past, he cannot revere the moment for its own sake and this, as Nietzsche explains, creates the Spirit of punishment. Every time the mariner feels the same anxiety towards the future, he returns to the critical moment, which is when the mariner shoots the albatross. This repetition of the recounting of the tale makes it real as “out of what by nature comes again and again develops something that is supposed to be decisive once and forever” (Löwith 103). Only through such an act of “constantly going back to the beginning and by starting over eternally,” can “the primeval nature [make] itself into a substance” (147-8). Thus when “...at an uncertain hour, / That agony returns,” the mariner takes to wandering about trying to tell his tale once more, because he cannot handle the pressure of the centre in which his will stands paralyzed (lines 582-583).

Like Nietzsche - Zarathustra, Coleridge’s mariner becomes the teacher of eternal recurrence. Zarathustra asks the sun “You great star! What would your happiness be if you had not those for whom you shine?” (Nietzsche 2003, 264). This question foreshadows Zarathustra’s mission as the great teacher of the eternal recurrence. Just like the sun, Zarathustra learns that he has to teach the eternal recurrence to the others, otherwise his existence would lose its meaning. The ancient mariner, having experienced the deepest nihilism, has to teach his experience to others. However, not everyone can be qualified to learn about this phenomenon. Thus the ancient mariner, through his “strange power of speech”, knows “the man that must hear [him]: / To him [his] tale” he teaches (lines 589-590). There is no explanation as to why the mariner chooses the wedding guest and not the other two. With this explanation, he gives the election process magical properties.

The ontological importance of shooting the albatross reveals itself in accordance with a Nietzschean reading. God is the biggest objection to man’s will to power according to Nietzsche. He believes that “the God who saw everything, saw man, too: this God had to die! Man cannot bear that such a witness should live” (2006, 387). Thus when the crew “hailed” the Albatross in “God’s name”, (line 66) they give it divine properties and turn it into a hallowed being. Since the albatross saves them from the imminent death offered by the cold Antarctic, it takes the place of the Saviour. In the presence of such a divine being, all the crew loses their will to power and become enthralled to its will. The mariner, albeit unconsciously, cannot stand this submission of his will to the bird of “good omen”. In order to free himself from this submission and become “abandoned to his own responsibility and command”, he shoots the bird (Löwith 37). The mariner, when subjected to the albatross’ will, is not a distinguished character; he has no say on the events and the conditions. However, when he shoots the albatross, which is a part of his divination process because “it is through violence that the victor obtains superhuman, almost divine condition of eternal youth, invincibility, and unlimited power”, he is freed from the clutches of the “thus it was” and from this moment on he recounts the events as happening because of him (Eliade 1959, 150). Up until the shooting of the albatross, there is no human will to speak of; the ship is driven by the winds, the ship is stuck in the South Pole, the albatross saves them, but shooting the albatross is a manifestation of the human will that takes the central stage for the first time in the chronological order of the events. The mariner, by regaining his own will, now has the ability to control others’ will as well. That is why he is able to have the wedding guest’s will.

The demise of the divine being, the Albatross in this case, in turn, is the harbinger of a greater distress. As a means of setting the human will free, the death of the divine being creates a gap. The mariner, who had thus far only been directed by the divine will, just like “The Eolian Harp” which could only “pour” its “sweet upbraiding” when exposed to the caress of the “desultory breeze” (line 15), does not know how to act on his own volition. Hence his despair and distress reflected in the form of becalming are expressed in the best words possible:

Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, ne breath ne motion,  
As idle as a painted Ship  
Upon a painted ocean. (lines 115-8)

“The gateway moment” which is manifested in the shooting of the albatross, becomes the moment when the mariner’s past, present and future converge. This is the moment his will is set free of the control of the divine will, and the moment the mariner lost all meaning of existence. Without the divine will, the ancient mariner is resurrected as “the man who is abandoned to his own responsibility and command, the man who finally has his

most extreme freedom in ‘freedom toward death’” (Löwith 37). Because of the existential crisis he goes through, the mariner looks for a fault which may have caused this punishment in the causal understanding of life.

As Mircea Eliade asserted, “man’s reactions to nature are often conditioned by his culture and finally, by history” and this is true on the mariner’s part as well (1959, 16). That is why the extreme nihilism he experiences is reflected in the “thousand thousand slimy things” that crawled upon the sea (line 238). These slimy water snakes represent “chaos, the formless and nonmanifested” as Eliade asserts (*Myth and Reality* 19). His chaotic existence is symbolized by these water snakes which at first seem and make everything look ugly and awfully evil as seen in the lines:

About, about, in reel and rout  
The death-fires danced at night;  
The water, like a witch’s oils,  
Burnt green, and blue and white. (lines 127-130)

Because of the snakes the sea looks ominous and chaotic. These snakes, as their symbolic value is not grasped by the mariner, seem portentous, evil and ominous. He resents their slimy bodies and colours because he believes them to be inferior to humankind. That is why he cannot bear to look upon them. As Coleridge wrote in the marginal gloss, “he despiseth the creatures of the calm, / And envieth that they should live and so many lie dead” (Coleridge 2004, 75). He thinks that the snakes and himself are worthless compared to the two hundred men that lie dead on the deck.

When he overcomes himself, as he understands that the water snakes are just as important as human beings are, the mariner is freed from the yoke of nihilism and accepts his place in the eternal recurrence of the same. The selfsame moment he blesses the water snakes “unawares” which symbolizes his transcendence. He transcends mere human and becomes “superman” when he partakes in the cosmic indifference. Just like the animals who “are natural and periodic things”, the mariner becomes one with the entirety of the universe by accepting the equal significance of all living things in a unanimous complacency (Löwith 73). The new understanding he attains, that that nature and man are one, lets him appreciate the beauty of the water snakes that looked ugly and ominous previously. From then on, all the colours of the snakes turn into an “elfish light” that “fell off in hoary flakes” (line 276). The rich colours of the snakes that looked like a “witch’s oils” turns into a “rich attire” and the portentous “green, and blue and white” colours that they had turn into “Blue, glossy green, and velvet black” (line 279). This transformation is significant because, just as Jung claims in his *Contributions to Analytical Psychology*, “before a ‘renewal of life’ can come about [...] there must be an acceptance of the possibilities that lie in the unconscious contents ‘activated through regression [...] and disfigured by the slime of the deep’” (in Bodkin 51).

The transformation the mariner goes through changes the “black snake[s] of strangling nihilism” into “the snake of the eternal recurrence”; and everything around the mariner is transformed through this, turning the “black sea of deadly melancholy [...] into the sea of forces that flow into themselves and of the ‘twofold voluptuous delights’ of the eternal recurrence” (Löwith 129). All these transformations, “that the beauty of life is revealed amid the slime, that the glory of life is renewed after stagnation, that through the power of speech the values achieved by life”, are indicators of the change he goes through, both physical and mental (Bodkin 78). The snake here is a significant metaphor for the transformation he goes through; like the snake that sheds its skin to become something new while retaining its old self, the mariner changes into his new life yet he remains the same simultaneously. The moral lesson he comes up with at the end is:

He prayeth well, who loveth well  
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small;  
For the dear God who loveth us  
He made and loveth all. (lines 612-617)

This conviction shows his conviction that he is in command of his own will, that this consciousness makes him responsible for all living things. This conviction can only be embraced by he who has overcome himself and come closer with the animal to become a new type of human, the Superman. As such, the Superman mariner accepts his place in the holistic existence of all things with and in him.

The death of “four times fifty living men” is significant in that their demise symbolises their inability to free themselves from a controlling will (line 216). They are first under the control of the bird of good omen, and when the bird is dead and “the fog [is] cleared off, they justify” the mariner’s action, by which they become subject to the mariner’s will (Coleridge 2004, 67). They do not have any will of their own, and thus cannot undergo the same process the mariner does. Their death is a must as the freed will of the mariner cannot be fully realized until he is alone. Once all the crew members are dead, the mariner is left alone. Just as Zarathustra experiences eternal return in his “loneliest of loneliness”, the mariner can find his exit from the nihilistic chaos in his loneliness (Nietzsche 2006, 194). His loneliness that lasts “seven days, seven nights” is a reflection of the biblical creation that lasts seven days (line 261). For Nietzsche, too, this loneliness is reminiscent of Zarathustra’s loneliness after his seven day sojourn in the cave, which anticipates a creation out of the chaos they are in. Thus, this process resembles a creation through which the mariner is reborn.

This rebirth is not like a Christian rebirth “to a new [...] and better life, but to the equal and self-same life ‘in the greatest and also in the smallest’—for the ‘small’ man, too, returns eternally” (Löwith 73). That is why he has to remember every single detail in his story every time he recounts it. This is the reason why he needs to remember the water snakes, and that they are as significant as the men that die. The symbol for this rebirth is the universal symbol of rebirth and revitalization: Water. Water is always the conduit that brings life. Even when it is the cause of destruction, life springs after its work is done. In the destruction myths of deluges and floods, there is always new life. That is why water is holy; that is why it is used in religious ceremonies like baptism or ablution. The significance of rebirth is that “when brought to birth, man is not yet completed; he must be born a second time, spiritually; he becomes complete man by passing from imperfect, embryonic state to a perfect, adult state” (Eliade 1959, 181). This incomplete state of man is visible in the mariner’s earlier stages. Before the curse begins, the mariner is just like the other mariners, with “no distinct character, either in his profession of Mariner, or as a human being” (*Lyrical Ballads* 276). What brings about his mature state is through immersion in waters. This voyage, in a sense, then, is his initiation into maturity. From this he returns as a man complete, with eyes that pierce into the beholder’s very soul. Immersion as an initiation is crucial because, as Eliade puts it, “one does not become a complete man until one has passed beyond, and in some sense abolished ‘natural humanity’” and “initiation rites, entailing ordeals and symbolic death and resurrection, were instituted by gods, culture heroes, or mythical ancestors, hence these rites have a superhuman origin, and by performing them the novice imitates a superhuman, divine action” (1959, 187). Thus, the novice mariner, by going through his ordeal, becomes the ancient mariner whose maturity is reflected in his bright eyes. This ordeal makes one “a sadder and a wiser man” (line 624) because “he who has experienced the mysteries, is he who knows” (Eliade 1959, 189).

The reason Coleridge used a sea voyage as a means of transforming the ancient mariner is that “contact with water always brings a regeneration – on the one hand because dissolution is followed by a new birth”; and this is evident in the symbolism of water snakes; “on the other because immersion fertilizes and multiplies the potential of life” (130). The mariner’s voyage is a journey to the unconscious, which destroys the man he was and reforms him in the form of the ancient mariner. As Maud Bodkin states, these unconscious messages surge in the form of familiar forms to show the “kind of memory-complex in the mind of Coleridge [...] who at this time had never been to sea” (39). The reason they do so is that “the waters symbolize the universal sum of virtualities; they are fons et origo, ‘spring and origin,’ the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence; they precede every form and support every creation” that is why even one like Coleridge with no naval experience prior to the composition of the poem could conjure such a vivid and “real” adventure (Eliade 1959, 130). The ship’s painting-like becalming in the Pacific Ocean is symbolically a suspension of reality and dissolution of forms represented in the “rotting decks” and “rotting seas” (lines 242, 240) which imply a process of death, dissolution and rebirth. The ominous sea and sea snakes that represent the formless and therefore, the nonmanifest, call forth a “regression to the preformal, reincorporation into the undifferentiated mode of pre-existence” through immersion in water (Eliade 1959, 130). The death and destruction implied by this immersion is “equivalent not to a final extinction but to a temporary reincorporation into the indistinct followed by a new

creation, a new life, or a 'new man'" (130). By disintegration and dissolving the forms of the fabric of reality, the waters wash away sins, and purify and regenerate the mariner as a new man. Immersion in waters, for the mariner, is the death of his old self and the birth of a new, reborn and regenerated being who is now able to discern the "unanimous agreement of everything in one highest type of Being", thus allowing him to celebrate and "bless" the sea snakes which previously repelled him (Löwith 97).

As a new and regenerated man, the mariner becomes the Superman who can "translate man back into the 'language of nature,' man's 'eternal basic text'" (Löwith 118). In his previous state, the cosmos was silent, meaningless, inert and opaque for him; he could not communicate with the universe, and thus did not know his place within the cosmic drama. Because of his loneliness he is able to discern the language of heaven since "the world of heaven says neither Yes or No. It speaks to [him] in the language of silence" (Löwith 99). This language of silence is represented in nature in the language of symbols and only a few "privileged individuals" manage to discern these symbols through "ecstatic experiences" (Eliade 1963, 97). The most significant symbolism used in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is the symbolism of the Sun and the Moon. As George Herbert Clarke states, "there are eleven references to the Sun and fourteen to the Moon", which makes them the chief recurrent symbols (27). The interplay of these two celestial orbs marks the dramatic changes in the poem. This interplay of "'day and night", as Clement of Rome suggests, "show[s] us the resurrection; night sets, day rises; day departs, night comes"' (in Eliade 1959, 137). The sun, as it is "always in motion [...] remains unchangeable; its form is always the same"; thus, it symbolizes order and stability (157). However, the moon, with its ever changing nature and phases, represents chaos, instability, mutability. Man sees in the phases of "the night from which the Sun is born every morning [...] primordial chaos, and the rising of the sun is a counterpart to the cosmogony" (Eliade 1963, 82). As the moon symbolises eternal return and mutability, every significant change in the poem happens when the moon is up. The morning brings stability and stagnancy. The parallel stanzas describing the movement of the sun which mark the direction of the ship clearly depict the stagnancy the sun implies.

The Sun came up upon the left.  
Out of the Sea came he!  
And he shone bright, and on the right  
Went down into the Sea. (lines 25-8)

And then right after he shoots the Albatross and before the curse begins:

The Sun now rose upon the right:  
Out of the Sea came he,  
Still hid in mist, and on the left  
Went down into the Sea. (lines 83-6)

The sun here is as a watchful god, who watches over the mariner and his crew. Nonetheless, after this stanza the image of the sun becomes one of a vengeful and fearsome deity who serves as a spirit of vengeance as depicted in the lines "[n]or dim nor red, like God's own head, / The glorious Sun uprist" (lines 97-8). The watchful eye of heaven turns into a red orb and from now on is the harbinger of ominous events. Karl Kroeber claims that "the Mariner's disasters occur under the 'aegis of the sun'" (181). As the terrible curse of drought begins, "bloody sun at noon" stands "no bigger than the moon" (line 114). All these troubles that are associated with the sun are stagnant and unchanging, which is related with the constancy of the sun. The first appearance of the phantom ship is when the sun is up in the sky and the ship suddenly drives between the mariner and the sun as if trying to sever the ties of the mariner and the watchful God.

The moon, on the other hand, is ever-changing. As it moves, it changes its shape according to its phases. Man sees in these phases the "'birth' of a humanity, its growth, decrepitude ('wear'), and disappearance" (Eliade 2005, 87). It is a symbol of hope since "just as the disappearance of the moon is never final, since it is necessarily followed by a new moon, the disappearance of man is not final either" (87). That is why all the "beneficent experiences" of the mariner happen "under the 'aegis of the moon'" (Kroeber 181). When the Albatross makes its first appearance, "through fog-smoke white", glimmers "the white moon-shine" (line 77).

The moment Life-in-Death wins the mariner, the moment of his utter loneliness, is depicted in the sudden shift from the morning to the night. As if obeying the Life-in-Death, when she says “I’ve won, I’ve won” and “whistles thrice” the sun suddenly disappears and “the stars rush out” and slowly “the horned Moon, with one bright star / Within the nether tip” starts climbing up the heavens (lines 210-1). Although it does not look beneficent because it is time the crew members die, this is the moment the mariner is left to his own will and his ablution begins. Thus when “one after one, by the star-dogged Moon” the crew members die, the mariner’s rebirth process slowly begins (line 212). It is “by the light of the Moon”, which the mariner “yearneth towards” that he is able to bless the water snakes and break free of the shackles of the curse (Coleridge 2004, 77). After the spell is broken, the corpses of the crew members rise under the effect of the moon; and when the dawn breaks, the angelic spirits leave the bodies cluttering around the mast only to return at night.

As the tour de force of Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” has often been debated over in the two hundred years since its composition. No matter how much it has been disregarded as a work of incredulity, its magical spell on the readers is an undeniable fact. Much of the magical power of the poem comes from the symbolic and psychological effects it wreaks upon the reader’s psyche. Although the poem seems improbable, “incomprehensible and without head or tail” (Coleridge 1975, 15), the reader, along with the wedding guest, is compelled to listen to the tale. The use of supernatural and Romantic imagery and symbols ascertain Coleridge’s famous formula of the “willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith” (Coleridge 1975, 169). The familiarity of these fears, hopes and awe is due to the unconscious archetypes hidden within humankind’s psyche. When the mariner’s tale is done, one knows that it is not the last time he has recounted his tale, that the mariner will find new wedding guests when “this heart within [him] burns” (line 585). The superhuman the mariner has turned into has to wander and “teach, by his own example, [to] love and revere [...] all things that God made and loveth” (Coleridge 2004, 99). Every time the mariner recounts his tale, he goes through the same event, and the eternal recurrence of these events become tangible realities that draw the wedding guest, and the reader into that reality. Coming back to the critical moment of his transformation into the superman, the mariner shows that becoming superman and overcoming the recurrent existence is not a one-time event, but is an ongoing process that needs to be reenacted time and again in order to cast away the mundane existence. Therefore, the eternal repetition and recounting of these events, in other words exposing himself to the transformative energies of the transformation, pulls him out of the nihilistic existence into a higher state of perception through which the mariner accepts and acknowledges his place within the universe.

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