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AFTER THE BIRD: TRACING ARCHETYPAL SIN AND COSMIC REDEMPTION BETWEEN *THE LIGHTHOUSE* AND *THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the intertextual relationships established between Robert Eggers's *The Lighthouse* (2019) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) through a multidisciplinary approach within the framework of narrative structure, mythopoetic representations, and ethical transgressions against nature. Both works revolve around a primal transgression symbolized by the killing of a bird, leading to isolation, madness, and spiritual reckoning. In this context, both narratives invite a rethinking of the human being's fragile, uncanny, and transgressive position within the cosmos through archetypal images rooted in the cultural unconscious. The study discusses how the desire for light, knowledge, and truth, represented by mythological figures such as Prometheus and Proteus, rests upon a foundation of hubris, based on the structural parallels between the character Winslow and the mariner figure. Eggers's black-and-white aesthetic, narrow framing, and claustrophobic spatial design are compared to the rhythmic and allegorical structure of the oral poetic narrative, offering a multilayered, aesthetically dense, and intuitive analysis of psychic disintegration. The film reveals a mythological and aesthetic dialogue with Romantic poetry, presenting a renewed opportunity to contemplate nature, crime, punishment, sin, and existence through the transforming forms of myth. Both narratives are considered powerful expressions of cosmic justice mirrored within individual consciousness through Gothic aesthetics, psychoanalytic imagery, metaphors, and mythological allegories.

Keywords: Myth, symbolism, ritual, ontology, deconstruction

BİR KUŞUN ARDINDAN: *DENİZ FENERİ* İLE *YAŞLI DENİZCİNİN EZGİSİ* ARASINDA ARKETİPSEL SUÇUN VE KOZMİK KEFARETİN İZİNDE

ÖZET

Bu çalışma, Robert Eggers'ın *Deniz Feneri* (*The Lighthouse*, 2019) adlı filmi ile Samuel Taylor Coleridge'in *Yaşlı Denizcinin Ezgisi* (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 1798) adlı şiiri arasında kurulan metinlerarası ilişkileri; anlatı yapısı, mitopoetik temsiller ve doğaya karşı işlenen etik ihlaller bağlamında disiplinlerarası olarak incelemektedir. Her iki eser de bir kuşun öldürülmesiyle sembolleşen asli bir suçun ardından bireyin maruz kaldığı lanet, yalnızlık, delilik ve kefaret süreçlerini merkeze alırken mitolojik ve ahlaki sorunları görünür kılar. Bu bağlamda her iki anlatı da arketipsel imgeler yoluyla insanın kozmos içindeki kırılgan, tekinsiz ve sınır ihlalcisi konumunu yeniden düşünmeye çağırır. Çalışmada Winslow karakteri ile denizci figürü arasında kurulan yapısal paralellikler üzerinden Prometheus ve Proteus gibi mitolojik figürlerle temsil edilen ışık, bilgi ve hakikat arzusunun kibirle ilişkisi tartışılmaktadır. Eggers'ın siyah beyaz estetiği, dar kadraj ve klostrofobik mekân kullanımı; sözlü şiir anlatısının ritmik ve alegorik yapısıyla karşılaştırılarak ruhsal çözülmenin temsiline dair çok katmanlı, estetik açıdan yoğun ve sezgisel bir çözümleme sunar. Film, romantik dönem şiiriyle mitolojik ve estetik diyaloğu ortaya koyarak mitin dönüşen formlarıyla doğa, suç, ceza, günah ve varoluş üzerine yeniden düşünme imkânı sunar. Her iki anlatı da kozmik adaletin bireysel bilinçteki yansımalarını gotik estetik, psikanalitik imgeler, metaforlar ve mitolojik alegorilerle sahneler.

Anahtar kelimeler: Mitos, simgesellik, ritüel, ontoloji, yapısöküm

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Introduction

Maritime narratives have long operated as allegorical frameworks through which writers probe the tension between human volition and the overarching forces, whether conceived as fate, providence, or cosmic law, that shape existence. Within this lineage, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) holds a distinctive place: it is not merely a canonical example of British Romanticism but also a mythopoeic inquiry into transgression and moral responsibility, framed by the uncertain hope of spiritual restoration. At its core lies an act that defies rational explanation; the killing of an albatross, presented as a sacrosanct envoy of the natural order, whose violation fractures the moral equilibrium and sets in motion a series of supernatural reprisals. The mariner's subsequent descent into isolation, spectral affliction, and an almost compulsive urge to narrate recalls what Ricoeur (1967) terms the "hermeneutics of suspicion," a dynamic in which storytelling can disclose culpability yet also, perhaps unconsciously, shield it from direct confrontation. As Abrams (1971) observes, the Romantic imagination frequently internalized the sublime, reshaping the external natural world into a mirror for psychological as well as moral crisis. In Coleridge's rendering, one that remains as unsettling now as in its own era, the drama unfolds not simply as an account of maritime disaster but as a concentrated enactment of inward disintegration.

Over two centuries later, Robert Eggers's *The Lighthouse* (2019) revisits these Romantic and Gothic preoccupations through the lens of cinematic expression. Set upon an isolated island lashed by wind and sea, the film chronicles the psychological unraveling of two lighthouse keepers ensnared in a claustrophobic interplay of dominance, repression, and existential dread. In a gesture echoing the mariner's transgression, Winslow, the film's troubled protagonist, enacts a similarly symbolic violence, the brutal killing of a seagull, which precipitates a hallucinatory spiral into madness and metaphysical disarray. The bird in Eggers's film, like Coleridge's albatross, functions not merely as an animal but as a liminal entity, positioned between the human and the nonhuman, the corporeal and the mythic. Its death signifies an abrogation of the tacit covenant between humankind and the sacred natural order. Drawing upon Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection, one might argue that the horror following such a transgression emerges not from the alien but from the irruption of the repressed, the breakdown of symbolic boundaries and the exposure of the subject to an unmediated chaos beneath the veneer of rationality.

This article undertakes a comparative and intertextual examination of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Lighthouse*, situating both texts within a critical constellation shaped by myth criticism, psychoanalytic theory, and ecocritical discourse. At the centre of this inquiry lies the recurring motif of the slain bird, conceived here as an archetypal emblem of sacrilegious rupture, an act that inaugurates a mythic sequence of retribution, psychic disintegration, and the fragile possibility of redemption. By aligning the trajectories of the mariner and Winslow with broader mythological paradigms, including the Promethean overreacher, the Protean shapeshifter, and the archetype of the cursed wanderer, the study seeks to elucidate the symbolic mechanisms through which each narrative interrogates humanity's fraught and often adversarial relationship with the sacred ecology of the world. Equal attention is given to the distinctive formal architectures of the two works: in Coleridge, the patterned use of balladic repetition, allegorical compression, and moral didacticism; in Eggers, the stark discipline of monochromatic cinematography, the constriction of aspect ratio, and the claustrophobic rendering of spatial environment. These formal strategies serve not merely as aesthetic choices but as integral vehicles for making visible the

interwoven processes of psychological collapse and metaphysical guilt. Ultimately, the argument advanced is that, despite their separation in genre and historical moment, both works converge in a shared symbolic cosmology, one that registers, with disquieting precision, the ontological peril inherent in transgressing the unspoken laws embedded within the fabric of nature.

The Mythopoetic Function of the Bird

Across mythic traditions and literary cosmologies, the bird frequently occupies a liminal position as a symbolic mediator between the terrestrial and the celestial, the mortal and the divine. In both *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Lighthouse*, the killing of a bird, an albatross in the former and a seagull in the latter, precipitates a rupture not only in the natural order but also within the ethical and psychological frameworks of the protagonists. These avian figures, far from incidental fauna, are endowed with archetypal resonance, functioning as totemic embodiments of both the sacred and the taboo. Their deaths mark the abrogation of an ancient covenant between humanity and nature, a transgression that recalls foundational myths of sacrificial violence and cosmic disobedience.

In Coleridge's poem, the albatross is not merely a bird but a supernatural guide, a harbinger of salvation whose presence dispels the fog and propels the mariner's ship to safer waters: "As if it had been a Christian soul, we hailed it in God's name" (lines 65–66). The reverence shown by the sailors underscores the bird's spiritual role and its alignment with divine benevolence. The mariner's impulsive decision to kill the bird is never rationalized within the poem, thereby reinforcing its status as a primordial sin, an affront to both the natural and the spiritual orders, that demands retributive justice. The bird's subsequent suspension from the mariner's neck transforms it into a burdensome relic of guilt, an externalized conscience marking him as both transgressor and penitent. As Frye (1957) observes, archetypes rooted in sacrificial imagery often reveal an underlying "myth of expulsion and return," in which the guilty figure must wander, suffer, and ultimately narrativize his trauma in order to re-enter the symbolic order.

Eggers's film reshapes this narrative pattern through the figure of the seagull, an analogue to the albatross that serves as a vessel of supernatural consequence. Early in the film, the elder lighthouse keeper delivers an ominous warning; "It is bad luck to kill a seabird," thereby anchoring the taboo firmly within maritime folklore. The gulls themselves are linked to the spirits of dead sailors, a connection that reinforces their liminal role between worlds. Winslow's violent outburst against one gull, striking it again and again until the body is shattered, constitutes a grotesque inversion of the sacred. This single act triggers a cascade of psychological and environmental upheavals: the wind shifts, storms break, and temporal stability begins to erode. Within this altered order, the seagull becomes a conduit for collective guilt and metaphysical reckoning, a figure whose death summons long-repressed anxieties lodged deep within the mythic unconscious.

Thus, both the albatross and the seagull serve not merely as symbolic figures but as pivotal agents of narrative transformation and metaphysical disturbance. Their deaths are not limited to punishing the protagonists; they draw them into positions of reflection, confession, and, ultimately, existential disintegration, a process in which the coherence of self and world slowly unravels. In both narratives, the killing of the bird represents more than a symbolic breach; it is also a direct assault on the sanctity of the natural world. This act unsettles the fragile balance between human existence and its surrounding ecology, casting the bird as a sacrificial figure whose death embodies an archetypal "sin against nature." The transgression sets in motion a sequence of repercussions,

environmental as well as metaphysical, underscoring that the cosmic justice envisioned in each work is inseparable from an ecological order shared by all beings, human or otherwise. Through these avian figures, Coleridge and Eggers engage in sustained meditations on the cost of violating sacred boundaries, meditations that, despite differences in genre and historical context, converge in their depiction of mythic justice enacted through the natural world.

Archetypal Sin and the Ethics of Transgression

At the heart of both *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Lighthouse* lies an act of ontological rupture, a transgression not merely against the natural world but against the sacred symbolic order that sustains meaning itself. The killing of the albatross and the seagull constitutes what Eliade (1957) would describe as a "fall out of sacred time," a moment in which the individual severs their bond with the mythic structure of the cosmos. Such acts are not crimes in a juridical sense but sins in a metaphysical one, evoking a guilt incommensurable with legal atonement and capable of resolution only through narrative, suffering, and, potentially, transformation.

The irrationality of the transgressions is striking in both narratives. The mariner kills the albatross, "with my cross-bow / I shot the ALBATROSS" (lines 81–82), without offering any motivation or justification. This arbitrariness finds an echo in Winslow's equally inexplicable burst of violence, which follows a sequence of mounting tensions and suppressed frustrations. In both cases, the absence of discernible rationale points to a deeper metaphysical compulsion: a fatal flaw embedded in the human psyche, which Bataille (1949) describes as the excess of human desire, the drive to violate taboos as a means of confronting the boundaries of selfhood and reason. One is reminded here of how such moments in literature often defy psychological realism, functioning instead as symbolic ruptures that align with mythic logic rather than with plausible causality. In this light, these acts become performative enactments of existential rupture, exposing a drive toward destruction that precedes conscious deliberation.

These transgressions activate deeply embedded mythic structures of punishment. The mariner is condemned to wander the earth as a spectral preacher of his own folly, burdened with an unending compulsion to narrate: "Since then, at an uncertain hour, / That agony returns" (lines 582–583). Winslow, by contrast, experiences a descent that is at once spatial and psychological, culminating in a final tableau reminiscent of Promethean torment, naked, blind, and pecked by gulls, his body strewn across the rocks. In both narratives, punishment is not externally decreed but arises from within, with each figure haunted by the gravity of their own symbolic violations. Such inward retribution recalls the dramaturgy of classical tragedy, in which catharsis derives not from juridical resolution but from the endurance of guilt. This alignment with tragic logic situates the protagonists at the intersection of ethical agency and archetypal destiny. They are not merely individuals who err; they are mythic actors reenacting ancient paradigms of hubris, fall, and divine retribution. Their trajectories underscore the ethical magnitude of violating sacrosanct boundaries and imply that redemption, if attainable, resides not in erasing the act but in bearing its narrative and ontological burden.

Madness, Isolation, and the Breakdown of the Psyche

Both *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Lighthouse* interrogate the psychic consequences of sacred transgression by staging the gradual disintegration of their protagonists' identities. The descent into madness and isolation that follows is not confined to the psychological

domain but extends into the ontological, signaling a rupture in the subject's relation to reality, language, and selfhood. Through deliberate formal strategies and carefully calibrated narrative structures, each work renders guilt as a spectral force, an uncanny presence that erodes the boundary between the conscious mind and the mythic unconscious.

In Coleridge's poem, the mariner's psychological fragmentation is reflected in his altered perception of nature and his growing dissociation from his fellow sailors and the divine order. After the killing of the albatross, he enters a world of sublime dread and metaphysical estrangement. His isolation is dramatized in the line, "Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide wide sea!" (lines 232–233), which not only conveys his solitude but also mirrors the obsessive looping structure of the traumatized mind. His visions of spectral ships, reanimated corpses, and the personified forces of Death and Life-in-Death signify a psyche that no longer distinguishes between the internal and the external. The mariner's eventual compulsion to retell his story, "this soul hath been / Alone on a wide wide sea" (lines 597–598) indicates that madness has been transfigured into narrative. He is condemned to repeat the trauma in the hope that its symbolic rendering might lead to redemption. This cyclical return to the moment of rupture reflects a broader Romantic preoccupation with the interplay between memory, guilt, and the possibility, however fragile, of spiritual renewal.

In *The Lighthouse*, Winslow's isolation is rendered both visually and sonically. Eggers constrains the film's aspect ratio to 1.19:1, evoking the proportions of early silent cinema and creating a visual claustrophobia that echoes Winslow's mental state. As the days blur together and the characters lose track of time, Winslow begins to hallucinate the presence of mermaids, tentacled gods, and doubles of himself and his companion. These visions are not merely surreal flourishes but indicators of a self-unraveling into multiplicity. Kristeva's notion of abjection is particularly relevant here: the self is confronted with what it has expelled, animality, desire, and death, and, in failing to keep these forces at bay, is ultimately absorbed by them. Winslow's psychological collapse culminates in his encounter with the lighthouse's forbidden beacon, a moment of simultaneous ecstasy and agony that mirrors the mariner's confrontation with cosmic judgment. In framing the descent through both sensory confinement and symbolic excess, Eggers crafts a cinematic space where madness is not an aberration but the inevitable outcome of violating the sacred boundaries between the human and the mythic.

Both protagonists experience madness as a breakdown of linear time and coherent selfhood. The mariner is trapped in an eternal present of narration, while Winslow is caught in a spiral of dissociation and delusion. Their respective isolations are not mere settings but metaphysical conditions: the sea becomes a stage upon which the self is dissolved, and nature itself turns hostile or inscrutable. In both narratives, madness functions as a form of revelation; it exposes the fragile constructions of rationality and the terrifying abyss that lies beneath. Where the mariner's story becomes a moral tale told to others, Winslow's ends in silence, his broken body devoured by gulls. One finds a mythic voice; the other, a mythic annihilation. In this juxtaposition, the works suggest that madness is not merely a symptom of inner collapse but a structural force within the mythic order, shaping how the transgression is remembered, narrated, or effaced.

Visual and Poetic Aesthetics of Ruin

The disintegration of the self in *The Lighthouse* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is not only thematic but also inscribed within the formal aesthetics of each work. Both Eggers and

Coleridge employ medium-specific techniques to render psychological collapse and metaphysical dread, elevating atmosphere and rhythm to the level of structural principles that guide the spectator's or reader's descent alongside the protagonists. The poetics of ruin in these texts are thus inseparable from their formal composition: visual constriction, tonal monotony, repetition, and symbolic density become the very language through which collapse is articulated. This alignment between form and theme underscores a broader aesthetic principle in which style does not merely reflect narrative content but actively shapes the audience's embodied experience of disintegration.

In Coleridge's poem, the balladic form serves a dual function. On one level, it aligns the narrative with oral tradition, reinforcing the mariner's role as a wandering storyteller condemned to repeat his trauma. On another, it allows for rhythmic intensification that mimics obsession and psychic fixation. The frequent use of anaphora, such as in "Alone, alone, all, all alone" (line 232), mirrors the mariner's internal echo chamber, a mind trapped in recursive grief. The alternating tetrameter and trimeter lines create a breathless, unstable rhythm that fluctuates between tension and release (Abrams, 1971, pp. 207–209). As Wolfson (2014) notes, Coleridge's strategic enjambment and lexical repetition give the poem a haunted tonality, where sound structure becomes an echo of interior collapse (p. 88). The poem's rich allegorical layering, embodied in figures such as Life-in-Death, the Polar Spirit, or the spectral ship, externalizes the mariner's guilt and renders it in Gothic iconography. The landscape becomes semiotic: rotting seas, slimy creatures, and lifeless winds mirror the degradation of the soul (Coleridge, 1798/2001, lines 123, 134). Through this interplay of form and symbolism, Coleridge's artistic choices do not merely convey the mariner's psychological state but immerse the reader in its rhythm and texture, transforming the poem into an experiential enactment of guilt and alienation.

Similarly, Eggers constructs *The Lighthouse* as a visual and auditory descent. The film's black-and-white palette eliminates chromatic cues, reducing the world to extremes of contrast and compelling the viewer to confront a space stripped of interpretive comfort. The square aspect ratio (1.19:1) produces a sense of spatial claustrophobia that quite literally boxes the characters into their fate (Eggers, 2019). Eggers further amplifies the aesthetic of ruin through sound: the incessant blare of the foghorn, the rhythmic crashing of waves, and the screeches of gulls create a soundscape of suffocating monotony. These auditory motifs operate like poetic refrains, ritualizing dread and rendering the viewer's experience compulsive and circular, much like the poem's cyclical stanzaic structure (Kristeva, 1982, pp. 9, 12). As Chion (1994) emphasizes in his theory of acousmatic sound, such sonic ambiguity intensifies psychological immersion and abstracts the viewer's sense of time and space (p. 74). Through this integration of visual austerity and auditory repetition, Eggers crafts a cinematic environment in which form is not merely a vessel for narrative but an active agent in shaping the audience's embodied experience of dread and inevitability.

One of the most visually iconic images in *The Lighthouse* is Winslow's final state, naked, broken, and pecked by birds, evoking Prometheus bound to the rock. This scene, steeped in chiaroscuro and rendered in slow, agonizing detail, recalls the sublime grotesque of Romantic and Gothic imagery (Abrams, 1971, p. 211). The film's aesthetic grammar thereby aligns visual ruin with narrative fate. In Coleridge, this correspondence is achieved through a symbolic economy in which every natural image, sun, sea, and sky, becomes part of a cosmic lexicon of punishment and revelation (Frye, 1957, pp. 145–149). Such parallel visual and symbolic strategies invite a comparative reading in which both works transform acts of transgression into enduring images of

metaphysical consequence, ensuring that the viewer or reader confronts not only the fate of the protagonist but also the larger moral architecture in which that fate is inscribed.

Both works stage ruin not as a single event but as an aesthetic continuum. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the decaying natural world is both a symptom and a cause of interior collapse. In *The Lighthouse*, *mise-en-scène* becomes a psychological environment, a projection of fractured identity. What emerges is a poetics of entropy: a mode in which rhythm, repetition, and stylistic austerity do not merely reflect breakdown but actively enact it. The aesthetics of ruin transform the viewer or reader into a participant in descent, drawing them into the rhythm of collapse, the poetry of disintegration, and the visual grammar of guilt. Considered together, these works demonstrate how the sustained interplay between form and content embeds the representation of ruin not merely at the thematic level but within the sensory and structural fabric of the text itself, compelling an immersive and affective engagement from the audience.

Redemption and the Possibility of Transformation

The prospect of redemption in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Lighthouse* is as ambiguous as it is central. Both texts engage with the archetype of the penitent wanderer, yet their outcomes diverge radically, one gesturing toward narrative restitution through language, the other descending into irreversible obliteration. While Coleridge constructs a redemptive framework grounded in the Christian metaphysical order, Eggers offers a more nihilistic vision in which the yearning for transcendence collapses into grotesque parody. Considered together, these works frame redemption not as a straightforward resolution, but as a contested site of symbolic struggle between guilt, time, and the sacred.

In Coleridge's poem, the mariner's path toward redemption is enacted through storytelling, which functions simultaneously as penance and revelation. His compulsive need to recount his tale, "Since then, at an uncertain hour, / That agony returns" (lines 582–583) aligns with Ricoeur's (1984) notion of narrative identity, wherein self-understanding is achieved not through direct moral restitution but through the "narrative configuration," the shaping of disparate events into a meaningful and temporally coherent whole, of past trauma. The mariner's redemption is provisional and cyclical: he is not forgiven once and for all, but is caught in a ritual of moral re-performance. As Miller (1981) observes, the poem stages redemption as a process of perpetual semiotic labor, a moral text that must be endlessly rewritten (pp. 87–88). Additionally, McGann (1985) emphasizes the Romantic preoccupation with textuality and confession, suggesting that Coleridge's poem dramatizes how narrative becomes a sacred rite in the absence of institutional absolution (p. 112). This intertwining of narrative form and spiritual purpose reveals how Coleridge transforms the act of storytelling into both an ethical obligation and a means of sustaining the mariner's place within a symbolic order.

Theologically, the mariner's transformation is mediated by grace: he blesses the sea-snakes "unaware," and this involuntary gesture marks the beginning of his spiritual rehabilitation. Yet, as Hartman (1964) argues, Coleridge's religiosity is ambivalent, deeply aware of the abyss that surrounds divine intervention. The mariner is not granted a peaceful end but is consigned to perpetual wandering, a liminal state between expiation and exile (p. 74). His penance is discursive, an endless retelling of a cosmic error in the hope that language can retroactively repair the rupture.

In *The Lighthouse,* however, redemption is deferred to a metaphysical horizon that remains inaccessible. Winslow's pursuit of light, his longing to ascend the tower and access the forbidden radiance, mirrors both Promethean ambition and Orphic descent. The film's climax, in which he finally confronts the beacon, is rendered in surreal, stroboscopic excess. His scream is distorted into unintelligible noise, and he is subsequently cast down the stairs, a literal fall from enlightenment. As Žižek (2011) might suggest, this moment is emblematic of the failure of the symbolic to accommodate *jouissance*; the Real erupts, and the subject is annihilated by the very object of his desire (p. 64). Jameson (2005) extends this logic by arguing that postmodern narratives often stage the collapse of transcendental signifiers, rendering desire unlocatable and redemptive closure impossible (p. 142). Where Coleridge's mariner survives through narrative, Eggers's protagonist is denied the *logos* altogether. Winslow's death, his disembowelment by seagulls and his exposure on the rocks, suggests a fate more akin to Tantalus or Prometheus: a mythic punishment for hubristic transgression. His body becomes an allegorical site, a warning inscribed into nature. The film's final image resists closure; there is no redemptive utterance, no reconciliation, only silence and grotesque stasis. In reframing the mythic arc toward an absence of resolution, Eggers transforms the traditional quest for transcendence into a meditation on the inescapability of loss, positioning the spectator within a space where the sacred offers neither redemption nor release.

Yet both works, in their own way, interrogate the possibility of transformation through suffering. As Benjamin (1923/1996) posits in his theory of storytelling, true narrative emerges not from victory but from endurance, from the scars that remain after the storm has passed (p. 90). In this sense, the mariner's story is not one of moral clarity but of wounded wisdom. Winslow's fate, though devoid of verbal legacy, becomes iconic, an image of sacrificial collapse that resists forgetting. As Neiman (2002) observes, the modern imagination is haunted not by theodicy but by the need to "find meaning in suffering without erasing it" (p. 209). Both texts wrestle with this challenge, offering no resolution but staging the question with aesthetic intensity. Viewed through this lens, they situate the experience of suffering within a broader philosophical discourse, where the absence of closure becomes itself a form of meaning, challenging the audience to confront the limits of redemption and the persistence of loss.

Temporal Dislocation and Mythic Time

A critical yet often overlooked axis shared by *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Lighthouse* is their treatment of time, not as a linear progression of events, but as a fragmented, cyclical, and mythically charged experience. Both texts dislocate their narratives from historical temporality and instead immerse their protagonists in a suspended, non-chronological realm wherein time becomes symbolic, ritualistic, and ultimately metaphysical. This shift is central to understanding the psychological and ontological unraveling that each character undergoes. By reframing temporality in this way, both works challenge conventional narrative causality, positioning time itself as an active force in the protagonists' descent and aligning their experiences with archetypal patterns of mythic recurrence.

In Coleridge's poem, time appears fractured and recursive. The mariner's voyage unfolds in a timeless space where natural laws collapse and divine justice governs with its own rhythm. The poem's famous line, "At an uncertain hour" (line 582), encapsulates this disorientation, suggesting that the mariner's return to memory, guilt, and storytelling is not anchored in historical sequence

but in an eternal present shaped by symbolic repetition. This cyclical temporality aligns with Eliade's (1959) theory of sacred time, in which mythic events occur in an archetypal, repeatable dimension outside historical time. The mariner's retellings function as a return to this mythic moment of rupture, continually reenacting his fall and partial redemption through the act of narration. Such a temporal framework not only situates the mariner's experience within a mythic paradigm but also reinforces the poem's broader meditation on the persistence of moral and spiritual consequences beyond the confines of historical chronology.

The structure of the poem itself reflects this distortion. The mariner is removed from a coherent timeline and becomes a spectral narrator whose temporality is governed not by sequential logic but by compulsive repetition. The poem opens *in medias res* and moves fluidly between past and present, folding the reader into a state of temporal suspension. His redemption, if it exists, is not linear or conclusive but provisional, replayed each time the tale is told. As Beer (1996) notes, Coleridge's temporal structure collapses narrative progression into symbolic circularity, thus transforming linear guilt into existential recurrence (p. 102). This temporal design not only shapes the reader's perception of the mariner's plight but also aligns the poem with mythic storytelling traditions in which recurrence functions as both a mode of remembrance and a means of sustaining the moral weight of the original transgression.

Similarly, *The Lighthouse* collapses linear temporality into a surreal loop that resists temporal coherence. Eggers deliberately obscures the passage of time: days blend into nights, characters lose count of their stay, and cause and effect blur. The island becomes a mythic space, a contemporary *axis mundus*, detached from worldly chronology and governed instead by ritual, repetition, and psychological distortion. As Bergson (1910) argued, true duration (*durée*) is qualitative and subjective, shaped by inner states rather than clock time. In Eggers's film, time is experienced as dread, as stagnation, and as oppressive eternity. The foghorn becomes a metronome of existential entrapment, and the lighthouse beacon a hypnotic eye that marks time not in minutes but in metaphysical weight. Through this manipulation of temporal perception, Eggers situates his narrative within a mythic framework in which time itself becomes a principal agent of the protagonist's undoing, binding psychological collapse to a cosmological order beyond human control.

The editing techniques employed in the film enhance this sense of atemporality. Jump cuts, abrupt fades, unresolved sequences, and the absence of temporal anchors, such as calendars or clocks, evoke a fractured logic of duration. Viewers are left in a state of perpetual disorientation, echoing Winslow's own descent into madness. In effect, time itself becomes a participant in the narrative, a ghostly presence that haunts rather than organizes. Winslow's hallucinations and delusions, of mermaids, tentacled gods, and impossible duplications, are not deviations from time but expressions of a mythic temporality in which distinctions between past, present, and fantasy dissolve. As Mulvey (2006) argues in her discussion of cinematic time, visual disruption can serve as an index of psychic trauma: "time is not lost but condensed and made monstrous" (p. 41). By merging formal disorientation with thematic collapse, the film transforms temporal instability into a central agent of psychological and symbolic disintegration.

Both narratives thus utilize temporal disruption to amplify existential crisis. Time ceases to be a medium for progress and instead becomes a prison of recurrence. For the mariner, each act of storytelling reactivates the trauma, forcing him into an ethical eternity. For Winslow, time becomes

an absurd, collapsing loop that mirrors his psychological fragmentation. Žižek (2001) links such temporal dislocations to encounters with the Real, moments that rupture symbolic continuity and hurl the subject into incoherence. In both texts, time fails to restore order; rather, it reveals the arbitrariness of order itself. Furthermore, mythic time reconfigures agency and responsibility. The protagonists are no longer modern individuals acting within secular history but mythic figures suspended in liminal space. The mariner becomes a cursed prophet; Winslow, a sacrificial Prometheus. Their experiences are structured not by chronology but by ritual and retribution, echoing mythic patterns of fall and punishment that unfold outside human temporality. As Frye (1957) notes, such patterns form the basis of mythopoeic narrative, wherein characters "live in a world of symbolic time, in which the moments of action are themselves archetypes" (p. 136). The isolation of both characters echoes the exile of the mythic hero, a temporal estrangement that marks them as scapegoats bearing collective metaphysical burdens. By framing their protagonists within this temporal and symbolic matrix, both works transform individual narratives of downfall into archetypal meditations on the inescapable cycles of transgression and retribution.

These mythic chronotopes also frame the ontological weight of guilt in both works. The mariner's penance is to retell his story eternally, indicating a return to *illud tempus*, a sacred time that is always re-accessible yet never redemptive in full. Winslow's punishment is to live outside of time altogether; his fate is fossilized in myth, consumed by seagulls in a grotesque echo of eternal return. Their suffering is not forward-moving but circular, echoing the structures of initiation myths, where trials are endured repeatedly to symbolize existential truths. As Mircea Eliade affirms, the ritual repetition of myth is not escapism but ontological realism: to relive the sacred past is to face the absolute structure of human meaning (Eliade, 1959, p. 69). Therefore, by dismantling chronological structure and invoking mythic time, both *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Lighthouse* resist realist narrative logic and instead situate their protagonists in metaphysical crises of duration, repetition, and symbolic fate. Their madness is not a deviation from normativity but a symptom of existing in a temporality where cause and effect no longer apply and where myth reclaims dominion over the rational order of time. In positioning madness within this mythic temporality, both works recast psychological collapse as a cosmological condition, binding individual fate to the enduring cycles of transgression and retribution.

Conclusion

The comparative interrogation of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Lighthouse* reveals a profound intertextual and intermedial engagement with mythopoetic structures that inscribe representations of guilt, transgression, madness, and temporality. Despite their divergent generic affiliations, Coleridge's canonical Romantic lyric and Eggers's contemporary expressionist cinema, both works articulate a shared symbolic cosmology rooted in archetypal motifs, ritual repetition, and the dissolution of rational coherence. Rather than merely cataloguing isolated moral infractions, these texts stage fundamental violations of cosmic order, acts whose reverberations fracture linear temporality, destabilize identity, and threaten the symbolic frameworks through which subjectivity is conventionally anchored. Viewed in this light, they position individual narratives of downfall within a universal mythic register, transforming personal culpability into an enduring meditation on the fragility of order in both human and cosmic domains.

Centrally situated in both narratives is the sacrilegious slaying of a bird, an event that exceeds literal consequence to signify a metaphysical rupture of the sacred pact between humanity and the natural world. The mariner's albatross and Winslow's seagull function not simply as avian figures but as totemic markers of ecological sanctity, taboo transgression, and mythic retribution. Their deaths operate as ritualistic thresholds, precipitating the protagonists' descent into a mythologized temporality wherein sequential causality is supplanted by cyclical punishment and ontological disintegration. By framing these acts within such a symbolic economy, both works transform individual moments of violence into enduring mythic signifiers that bind human destiny to the moral order of the natural world.

The formal architectures of both texts reinforce their philosophical and symbolic investments. Coleridge's use of metrical regularity, rhythmic incantation, and allegorical personae configures the mariner's journey as a redemptive semiotic circuit, a compulsive narrative ritual wherein trauma is endlessly rehearsed but never definitively reconciled. Eggers's filmic grammar, by contrast, aestheticizes psychic erosion through visual minimalism and auditory excess: its black-and-white cinematography, restrictive aspect ratio, and oppressive sound design construct a claustrophobic chronotope in which temporal orientation and linguistic coherence collapse. Winslow's final scream, deprived of semiotic structure, epitomizes his transmutation into pure image, an icon of abjection suspended between the sublime and the grotesque. By aligning formal strategy with thematic content so precisely, both works transform their respective mediums into active agents of meaning, ensuring that the experience of collapse is not merely represented but enacted.

Through this juxtaposition emerges a dialectical reflection on the limits and possibilities of representation in the face of ontological rupture. Whereas *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* upholds narrative as an ethically generative practice, an act through which guilt may be rendered legible and partially exorcised, *The Lighthouse* stages the implosion of narrative itself under the weight of the Real. These texts delineate polar trajectories: the mariner, condemned to perpetual articulation; Winslow, consigned to symbolic erasure. Considered in this context, they interrogate the preconditions under which subjectivity may persist in the wake of sacred violation, ultimately framing the endurance or collapse of narrative as a measure of humanity's capacity to contend with the metaphysical consequences of transgression.

In their culmination, both works scrutinize the condition of the modern subject as temporally dislocated, mythically refigured, and structurally undone. Drawing upon Eliade's notion of sacred time, Frye's theory of archetype, Kristeva's abjection, and Žižek's theorization of the Real, the protagonists emerge not as psychologically individuated figures but as ritual vessels, repositories of collective anxiety and metaphysical excess. Their respective descents into madness signal not pathological deviation but symptomatic expressions of a symbolic crisis that transcends personal trauma and implicates broader cultural and ontological concerns. Ultimately, this comparative analysis affirms that myth endures not merely as narrative residue but as a structural logic of rupture and recurrence. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *The Lighthouse* illuminate how the transgression of symbolic boundaries inaugurates a crisis of meaning that resists closure. Their narrative and aesthetic operations do not resolve this crisis; rather, they stage its intractability. In dramatizing the rupture of the sacred, they gesture toward a bleak yet poignant truth: that, in the aftermath of cosmic dislocation, only the act of repetition, whether through speech, silence, or image, remains as the final gesture of existential endurance in a world unmoored from order,

coherence, and grace. Such an ending reframes narrative itself as a vessel for enduring the unendurable, positioning both works within a larger philosophical discourse on the limits of meaning and the resilience of symbolic form. In this light, the study underscores how the persistence of myth, across mediums, genres, and historical moments, functions as a cultural strategy for confronting the boundaries of human experience and negotiating the fragile balance between disorder and the search for significance.

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