The Gothic Appropriation in S.T. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

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Abstract

This paper employs Michael Gamer's argument in *Romanticism and the Gothic* (2006) to interpret various Gothic elements in Samuel T. Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". Gamer argues that Romantic poets, in order to gain wide readership and money and to avoid critical aspersions, attempted to appropriate the materials associated with Gothic writing. These poets, while writing negative critical reviews of Gothic works, composed Gothicised poems or poems with Gothic elements and discourses. Coleridge, like other major Romantic writers, saw the necessity for carefully appropriating the popular conventions associated with the Gothic, and "The Rime" is an example of his attempt at this Gothic appropriation. The poem is characterised by Coleridge's attempt to incorporate various supernatural elements by presenting them as acceptably as possible.

The Gothic, Its Reception and Appropriation

It is of some interest to look at the word "Gothic" whose historical, social and cultural definition changed as the 18th century progressed. The word "Gothic" originally derives from the name of the Germanic tribe, the Visigoths, who invaded and destroyed the Roman Empire. In this sense, the word "Gothic" connotes barbarity as opposed to the civilisation of the classical Roman Empire. The second edition of the first Gothic fiction in English literature, *The Castle of Otranto* (initially published in 1764) by Horace Walpole, appeared with the subtitle "A Gothic Story". This story, albeit abounding with brutality and cruelty, is not about the Visigoths but is a tale of supernatural events set in the Middle Ages, complete with chivalric hero and persecuted heroine. This indicates that the term "Gothic" had departed from the earliest sense of the word which denoted the historical account of the barbaric Visigoths to an aesthetic associated with medievalism. As Alfred Longueil notes: "Walpole's *Otranto* and Clara Reeve's *Old English Baron* were literary "Gothic stories" in the second sense of the word "Gothic"; that is, they aimed at a medieval atmosphere by means of medieval background" (458). Bishop Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance* (1762) is among the earliest of works which sought to associate "Gothic" with chivalry, romance and medievalism. Thanks to this book, during the late eighteenth century, the term "Gothic" started to acquire positive connotation. Found among the Dark Ages' primitivism and barbarism are power, a vigour and a sense of grandeur of the forgotten Gothic past of Britain. The Gothic revival in England, which was initially seen in the field of architecture, also inspired an interest in antiquarianism, old Welsh poetry,

ballads and English medieval poetry, all of which were considered to be part of ancient British heritage (Punter, *Literature of Terror* 5-7).

The British Gothic literature of the late eighteenth century was largely defined by fiction or the "romance", a literary genre which had long been associated with the fantastic, the extravagant, the improbable and the medieval, and later, also, by drama. The Gothic romance of Walpole inspired many writers. Among them was Clara Reeve who made clear, in her Preface to *The Old English Baron: A Gothic Story* (1778), her indebtedness to him. Her works however are different from Walpole's in their treatment of supernatural machinations. That is, she keeps her tales, as she puts it in the same Preface, "within the utmost *verge* of probability" (3). Without supernatural intervention, except for a few mysterious groans, the hero of *English Baron* must make his own way to claiming his usurped title. The technique of "explained supernatural", whereby supernatural incidents are explained away by non-supernatural means, was perfected and popularised by Ann Radcliffe whose successful works invited a horde of imitators and theatrical adaptors. In 1794 theatre goers saw James Boaden's *Fontainvilles Forest* (1794), Covent Garden's successful adaptation of Radcliffe's most critically acclaimed novel, *The Romance of the Forest*. Lewis's play *Castle Spectre*, which opened at Drury Lane in 1797 was perhaps the most successful. Towards the close of the century, the literary market witnessed the most notorious Gothic fiction, *The Monk*: *A Romance* (1796), by Matthew Lewis. The 1790s was thus crucial to the rise of the Gothic as a genre and "we see gothic emerge into public consciousness as a recognized mode of fiction" and "the attacks on gothic as a genre […] gathered force around 1796" (Gamer 72-73).

Gothic literature received hostile criticism from all quarters. The *Monthly Review* and *The Critical Review*, for half a century, acclaimed those literary works deemed to be instrumental in social improvement and education and the Gothic tale of terror and horror, as opposed to decent literature able to "teach and delight", was to receive hostile responses. The tradition of Gothic criticism, beginning in the 1780s and persisting throughout the Romantic era, usually "focused upon the pernicious effects of Gothic romance on the young female readership" (Wright 19). This group of readers was considered to be "the untutored reader of romances who might try and mimic some of the lewd scenes" (Wright 19). It also produced a feminising and infantilising effect upon (young) male readers as the *Monthly Review* (November 1792) noted: "It ["an imitation of the Castle of Otranto…the Old English Baron, and others"] contributes to keeping alive that superstition which debilitates the mind…the good writer teaches the child to become a man; the bad and the indifferent best understand the reverse art of marking a man a child" (337). Scott considered the Gothic the lowest genre of literature, linking it to "the lowest denizens of Grub Street narrating…all that malevolence can invent and stupidity propagate" (qtd.

in Gamer 34). Scott here was obviously directing his criticism towards the question of social class and taste by assigning the Gothic to the low culture, the low author and the low reader. Coleridge went further, moving from social class to national concern. His anonymous review of Lewis' *The Monk* in *The Critical Review* (February 1797), which is indeed one of the severest critiques, illustrated his national concern with the flourishing of the Gothic, pointing out that the use of horror and the supernatural suggested a state of literary torpor in the country and then went on to lambast *The Monk* and its author for creating "[f]igures that shock the imagination, and narratives that mangle the feelings" (195).

The criticism of *The Monk* deserves special attention as it encouraged the British Gothic tale of the 1790s to be increasingly dismissed by critics as "German", a pejorative term associated with foreign immorality and overt supernatural predilection. *The Monk*, according to Lewis's letters, was inspired by Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* but its printed Advertisement (1796) pointed to German and Spanish sources. This led the *British Critic* and the *Monthly Review*, among others, "to attribute *The Monk*'s treatment of sexuality and religious institutions to the nineteen-year-old Lewis's being corrupted by German morality and culture" (Gamer 77). The November 1797 *British Critic*'s third attack on *The Monk* rendered its horror as "[German] importations" whilst the 1797 *Monthly Mirror* 4 pointed out the origins of the Gothic in his work lay in his "intimacy with German literature" and concluded that his plays such as *Dream of Osmond* and *Atheism* "are all *German*" (qtd. in Gamer 77-78). The review of *The Monk* thus set the tone of this association. Later, the British Gothic tale of horror was especially considered to be, even heavily, influenced by the German Gothic. As Gamer notes, "Lewis's *Monk*, *Castle Spectre* and subsequent dramas effectively invited readers to remove gothic from English moorings to German ones [and] everything isolated as excessive is immediately exported to Germany and to German drama" (78). Even the works of Radcliffe could not avoid being associated with "Germanness". The *Antijacobin Review* 7 (September 1800), in its belated review of *The Italian*, criticised "the wilderness, the mysterious horror of many situations and events", labelling those qualities "rather German than English [as] they partake of Leonora's spirit: they freeze; they 'curdle up in the blood" (28). The *Monthly Review* (January 1819) later illustrated the atmosphere at the time when "The Rime" was first published as being one when "Germany was poured forth into England, in all her flood of sculls and numsculls" (28).

Therefore, those whose works were labelled as Gothic in general, and criticised as "German" in particular, were on the verge of losing critical reputation and Coleridge and his works attracted a similar label due to his association with Gothic drama and his publication of Gothicised poems. The Gothic was so fashionable and financially promising that major Romantic writers became not only translators of German Gothic plays but also Gothic

playwrights themselves before turning their backs on it. Coleridge and Wordsworth did write their own Gothic tragedies for Drury Lane but they were unsuccessful. On one occasion, the *Monthly Review* (October 1800) accused Coleridge, for his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein* in 1800, of being a "Partizan of the German theatre" (336). He keenly denied the accusation although his six-year enthusiasm for German literature and risky travelling to Germany during wartime to learn its language and culture were widely known. The *Analytical Review* (December 1798) once talked of the author of "The Rime" as having "the extravagance of a mad German poet" (584). Even though the term "German" was ascribed to Coleridge after he had published "The Rime", it does demonstrate the greater degree to which such German accusations could damage a poet's reputation—certainly Wordsworth hesitated over whether or not to include "The Rime" in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* after "The Rime" had received so many negative reviews.

Coleridge wrote a number of reviews against Gothic fiction as a way of establishing himself as a guardian of taste, of retaining his critical reputation and of distancing himself from any association with Gothic conventions. Coleridge spent eight months (1797-1798) writing reviews for the *Critical Review*. Writing wearily to William L. Bowles, Coleridge expressed his contempt for what "Terrorist Novel Writing" (1797) called the Gothic "recipe":

> Indeed I am almost weary of the Terrible, having been an hireling in the Critical Review for these last six or eight months—I have been lately reviewing the Monk, the Italian, Hubert de Sevrac & &c & &c—in all of which dungeons, and old castles, & solitary houses by the Sea Side, & Caverns, & Woods, & extraordinary characters, & all the tribe of Horror & Mystery, have crowded in on me—even to surfeiting (qtd. in Gamer 98-99).

According to Gamer, Coleridge's reviews of the Gothic fictions which are similar to others critical reviews' discourse caution the readers and especially writers of Gothic, of the cultural costs of engaging with Gothic traditions. While Gothic readers risk associating themselves with the denizens of Grub Street, as Scott put it, and "with the vitiated tastes of readers for whom "wonders, and wonders only, can charm", "[m]ore seriously, gothic writers risk losing their cultural legitimacy, social respectability, and standing as serious authors"(Gamer 42). Lewis, for example, found himself unable to eschew his association with the Gothic. He was given the derogatory title "Monk Lewis" and his subsequent works, including his best tragedy *Alfonso, King of Castille* (1805), were unfavourably reviewed after the publication of *The Monk*. In addition, Coleridge's harshest review of Gothic fiction was his review of *The*

Monk in the *Critical Review* in which he raised national concern over the corruption of popular taste and the decline of literature:

> The horrible and the preternatural have usually seized on the popular taste, at the rise and decline of literature. Most powerful stimulants, they can never be required except by the torpor of an unawakened, or the languor of an exhausted, appetite. The same phenomenon, therefore, which we hail as a favourable omen in the belles lettres of Germany, impresses a degree of gloom in the compositions of our countrymen. (194)

Gamer observes that much of Coleridge's criticism, especially the one on *The Monk,* recurs in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (99).

Coleridge, however, knew that he needed to appropriate and incorporate Gothic elements into his works if he wished to gain wide readership and money. Indeed, he knew that he could always make some money by writing a Gothic drama or translating German Gothic plays. Returning, indigent, from Germany in 1799 but still finding the London theatres' demand for German and Gothic drama, Coleridge sold his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein* to Longman and Rees in 1800. His biographers and critics, such as Hill and Gamer, also point out that "The Rime" exploits the Gothic mode for money. Wordsworth's Fenwick note to "We are Seven" is crucial to their suggestion:

> In the spring of the year 1798, he [Coleridge], my Sister, & myself, started from Alfoxden, pretty late in the afternoon, with a view to visit Linton and the valley of Stones near it; and as our united funds were very small, we agreed to defray the expense of the tour by writing a poem, to be sent to the New Monthly Magazine…Accordingly we set off and proceeded along the Quantock Hills towards Watchet, and in the course of this walk was planned the poem of 'The Ancient Mariner'…[which] grew and grew till it became too important for our first object which was limited to our expectation of five pounds, and we began to talk of a volume…Accordingly I wrote 'The Idiot Boy', 'Her Eyes are wild, etc.', 'We are Seven', 'The Thorn', and some others. (368)

Hill, by drawing his argument from the above note, indicates that "The Rime" is "a means of exploiting the fashionable Gothic mode in the hope of earning 5 pounds from the *Monthly Magazine*" (128). Gamer similarly suggests "if the volume began with the composition of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", it did so in an effort to exploit the popularity of supernatural poetry for financial gain" (93). In addition, since "The Rime" was written as magazine poetry, it

differs in no way from Coleridge's poems with Gothic elements such as "Lewti; or the Circassian Love Chant" (written for the *Morning Post* on 13th April 1798) and "The Voice from the Side of Etna: or the Mad Monk: An Ode" (appearing in the *Morning Post* on 13th October 1800) (Gamer 227). It is unclear when "it became too important" and when "they began to talk of a volume".

Given the popularity of the Gothic among the public and its vilified status among critical readers, it is far from perplexing that at the same time that Coleridge was writing reviews of Gothic fictions he was also composing Gothicised play such as *Osorio* and poems such as "The Rime", "Christabel" and "Kubla Kan" in order, arguably, to gain money and a large audience. As much as a year before the publication of *Biographia Literaria* in 1817 in which an entire chapter is devoted to attacking Charles Maturin's *Bertram*, the literary market witnessed the publication of his "Christabel" and *The Pain of Sleep* in 1816. Gamer illustrates the necessity of appropriating the popular conventions associated with Gothic writing:

> Gothic's cultural status in these years plays such a central role in the economic behavior of writers and in their processes of self-definition. If gothic's widespread presence in romantic writings is frequently accompanied by ambivalence and apology, it is because these same writers are appropriating economically valuable materials (to draw readers) and attempting to transform them into culturally valued materials (to satisfy an increasingly vocal critical audience). Gothic, then, is at once extremely attractive to writers wanting readers…[and] to the owners of circulating libraries who commonly organized their books by genre, and to the patrons of libraries and bookshops who chose their reading material either by title or by its blue-and-white Minerva Press binding. (23-24)

Therefore, a careful and subtle appropriation of the Gothic conventions was crucial for his works if he meant them to be praiseworthy for critics and commercially successful among the public.

It should be noted that the Gothic was considered by the 1790s contemporaries and modern critics as an aesthetic moving across genres and forms rather than a distinct mode of writing. This explains why the 1790s Gothic writers, readers and critics, though they tried to make sense of the emergence and the popularity of the Gothic after 1794, were able to group together, without much difficulty, the Gothic texts of disparate genres from James Boaden's drama and Lewis's ballads to Decre's fiction within the single category of the Gothic due to the recognisable Gothic protean elements which move across

genres and transplant themselves across form and media and, also, the fact that the contemporaries did not exclusively consider the Gothic as fiction nor a narrative mode (Gamer 3). Robert Miles also suggests that "we should not understand Gothic as a set of prose conventions, however flexible, but as a discursive site crossing the genres" (3). Gamer echoing Miles, similarly argues for the heterogeneous nature of Gothic texts which "contain multiple modes of writing, shifting from novelistic prose into poetry, inset oral narratives, didactic fables, or pantomimic and dramatic spectacles. With Miles, then, [he] define[s] gothic neither as a mode nor a kind of fiction (the "gothic novel") but as an aesthetic" (4). In addition, as the Gothic tradition is agreed to have developed from or have been influenced by the "Graveyard School" of poetry to which Romantic poetry's preoccupation with melancholy is also seen to be the heir, what are considered to be Gothic discourses and gloomy Graveyard images are frequently found in Romantic poetry.

Many Romantic poets employ a troupe of discourses associated with Gothic writing in many of their political poems whose Gothic imagery and motifs are predominantly shaped by the horror of the French Revolution, an event which also affected Gothic discourse. David Punter and Glennis Byron demonstrate the way in which the Gothic discourse in romantic poems carries a political inflection. For instance, in William Blake's *The French Revolution* (1791), references to skeletons, the 'eternal worm', a man 'chained hand and foot, round his neck and iron band, bound to the impregnable wall echo Radcliffe and Lewis's emphasis on "tyranny….[and] the horrific and seemingly limitless powers of the despot" (14). Lord Byron's "The Prisoner of Chillon" (1816) narrates the story of three brothers being imprisoned for a political reason in a dungeon in Gothic Chillon Castle with the oldest watching his brothers drop dead one by one. This kind of the horror, generated by the image of imprisonment, recalls perhaps the most notorious theme of imprisonment from Lewis's play, *The Captive,* which, after having been performed at Covent Garden on 22nd March 1803, "proved much too terrible for representation, and two people went into hysterics during the performance, & two more after the curtain dropped" (234), as Lewis wrote to his mother. This play was staged only once. Percy Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1813), *The Revolt of Islam* (1817) and *The Cenci* (1819) illustrate the ways in which social injustice leads to social violence when "the outlaw, the bandit, is behaving in a justifiable fashion when he is responding to the impositions of an unjust and unjustifiable society" (Punter and Byron 16).

One of the popular means by which Romantic poets appropriated Gothic horror was to make central to their poems the psychological dimension of their protagonist. As Punter and Byron argue in the case of William Blake's *Thel* (1789), apart from its recognisable language of the graveyard school, it lays emphasis on secrets and the unknown land and the vulnerable heroine travelling

to dangerous places, all of which strongly recall the Gothic's plot and scenario. They read this Gothic-influenced poem as a "narrative of the psyche" and "a journey through the mind" as it explores "the psyche depths of the protagonist" (13-14). As for Coleridge's works, John Spencer Hill's *A Coleridge Companion* (1983) is among the earliest work to argue for Coleridge's preoccupation with the psychological exploration. Hill suggests that Wordsworth's "The Three Graves" and Coleridge's "Osorio", "The Wandering of Cain" and "The Borderers" explore the fashionable themes of crime and remorse; they are "a study of criminal psychology" (125). Later, critics such as Punter and Byron, also found Coleridge "less emphasis[ing] on [the] political dimension and more on psychological mood, in the characteristically Coleridgean range of dejection, disappointment and melancholy" (14). They conclude that "[t]he numerous ghosts and spectres in Coleridge's poetry are, critics usually opine, related to his own pervasive feeling of guilt" (15), and in many cases, an objectification of his nightmare, while at the same time arguing that although "the ghosts that tortured [Coleridge] were of his own imagining, […] this is no way lessened their potency" (16).

"The Rime"'s Gothic Appropriation

It is the psychological aspect of the "The Rime" that this paper first examines, apart from the genre and other archaic aspects Coleridge employs as means of Gothic appropriation. To begin with, Hill interestingly observes that the ghost appearing in "The Rime" is highly malicious, not as much by the standard of the Gothic horror as that of the ballad. He suggests that although "there are occasionally ghosts in the folk ballads, they are harmless creatures, whose tasks is to admonish rather than to terrifying the living, [...] there is nothing in traditional balladry to rival Coleridge's Polar Spirit or the graphic horror of such a nightmare spectre as Life-in-Death" (139). The ghost is indeed terrifying because "The Rime" was meant to be sensational in order to capture a wide readership and to be able to compete with those horrid works of Lewis and Göttfried Bürger (a German writer who is best known for his Gothic ballads which were translated into English and French). A more careful examination of the poem's appropriation of the Gothic conventions, however, reveals it to be a tale of both ghostly horror and psychological terror—or the psychological exploration of crime, guilt and punishment and repentance — subjects which Coleridge and Wordsworth had engaged with in writing dramas and poetry as mentioned above. The existence of demons and spectres is highly ambiguous. This is because their appearance in the poem is not only for sensational purposes but they are also a symbolic projection of the mariner's tormented and troubled unconsciousness mind.

The mariner's act of killing the albatross is motiveless because his motive is not as important as his guilt and the retribution following the act of

killing. The mariner's isolation and loneliness imposed upon him because of his crime are a greater contribution to his horrifying experiences. The repetition of images of isolation and solitude is found throughout the poem. He is quite alone and alienated even at the beginning. It is presumed that his shipmates stop associating with him after he has killed the albatross. Later it appears that human communication is denied not only to him but to all onboard because of thirst: "And every tongue thro' utter drought/Was wither'd at the root;/We could not speak no more than if/We had been choked with soot" (392). The ship does not move and remains "idle as a painted Ship" (392); it just turns into a floating prison. He is later left completely alone after all the ship's crew has died. He is alone in a seemingly vast area as the ocean which is, in fact, so narrow a space for the mariner who cannot go anywhere but must stay on a ship. He is simply confined and "[a]lone, alone, all, all alone/Alone on the wide wide Sea" (395). The complete loneliness, isolation and solitude greatly affects or even traumatises his mind and hence "[his] soul in agony" (395). He is so anguished that he considers himself to be alone in the universe: "So lonely 'twas, hat God himself/Scarce seemed there to be" (405). This loneliness is unbearable because the experience of confinement and claustrophobia is one of human's deepest fears. Nina Auerbach lists "the uncanny feelings encountered in all the incidents of being locked in, of enclosure and confinement" (39) as the Gothic uncanny that provokes a sense of ultimate disturbance. Lewis' *The Captive,* a single-scene play about a woman who is imprisoned and later rescued only to be found insane, substantiates this as mentioned earlier.

The guilt of killing the albatross and of feeling responsible for the death of his shipmates together with the insufferable loneliness and alienation that he is surrounded with acutely agitates his mind. So, throughout the poem correlations between appearances of ghosts and the state of his tormented mind can be found. Only after the mariner has been burdened with guilt and felt isolation do the ghosts start to appear. The ghost ship steered by the Death and the Life-in-Death emerges first and it is the mariner who is the first to behold it. Seen through the eyes of the mariner, the ship, which is approaching nearer, is presented not only as a "skeleton of ship" (as 1817 *gloss* explains) because "the strait Sun was fleck'd with bars" but also as "a dungeon grate" (393); precisely the images of prison and imprisonment. These images are connected to the mariner's current state of mind, imprisoned with guilt and confined with loneliness as illustrated above. The ship approaches nearer and the mariner sees two figures, the Death and the Life-in-Death. The fact that the mariner's account refrains from reporting other crew members' reactions upon witnessing the two horror figures makes it highly ambiguous as to whether or not other crew members, while actually seeing the ship, really identify these figures. In addition, it is evident that the mariner is the only one who can hear the two ghosts gambling for their lives. If he is the only one who can hear, he is also the

only one who can discern the ghosts. The fact that the mariner overhears them conversing about his and the other sailors' fate, while the others do not, either indicates his anxiety about what lies ahead or suggests what he hears is actually his own inner voice. Later when he is rendered unconscious, he vaguely hears The First Voice and The Second Voice discussing his fate again. His account of hearing these two Voices is unreliable in the first place since he is in a semi-conscious state. In addition, what is particularly striking regarding these two Voices and the Death and the Life-in-Death is that, although they talk about him, they do not talk to him. This represents the objectification of his inner voice.

The next supernatural event occurs when the sailors' corpses are reanimated. The mariner believes that angels are presiding over these corpses and reanimating them. Again, these corpses do not talk to him and there is no physical affirmation of the angels because the mariner sees only "forms of light" (*gloss*). These "forms of light" are the last supernatural element in the poem and are a projection of the mariner's hope. The lights are crimson and thus equivalent to blood as many critics have suggested. They leave the dead bodies and rise to the sky precisely after the mariner sees the "light-house", "hill" and "kirk" or church. The mariner, at this point, refers to his crime as "[t]he Albatross's blood" (403) which he hopes to wash away when he sees the church. Those crimson lights which are rising and disappearing in the sky symbolise his hope to make his bloody crime disappear too. It should be noted that there is even a rational explanation to these forms of "crimson colours". James B. Twitchell cites John L. Lowes, who attempts to provide a scientific explanation for the "crimson colours" in "The Rime". According to Lowes, crimson light is generated from plankton "burning" with phosphorescence (148). However, it is uncertain if Coleridge had ever seen this natural phenomenon which was to be found on certain English coasts. Even if he had, it is unlikely that he was referring to it. In all these circumstances, the appearance of ghosts and spirits is so vague that readers may wonder if they are real, at least for the crew members, or just a form of objectification of the mariner's deeply troubled mind. Indeed, it is so ambiguous that it is still safe to apply Punter and Byron's suggestion of Coleridge's Gothic poems that "Coleridge was well aware that the ghosts that tortured him were of his own imagining, but he was equally aware that this in no way lessened their potency" (Punter and Byron 16).

Gamer's reading of Wordsworth's *The Ruined Cottage* is of particular interest as he interprets the poem as a criticism of any strong sympathetic identification with the Gothic narrative. Gothic literature is known to produce strong emotions in the readers from its scenes of suffering. The *Ruined Cottage* centres upon the Pedlar's tale-telling of Margaret's tragically Gothic narrative to the young poet. It is clear that both the narrator and the listener become possessed by the narrative, an act, as some critics opine, equivalent to being unmanned or emasculated and, thus, identifiable with female Gothic readers

who were perceived to be untrained readers carrying sympathetic identification to the point of excess. As noted by Gamer, "[the listener" fails to profit from the Pedlar's narrative other than transforming symptoms of Margaret's suffering onto himself through too literal an identifications with her" (112). *The Ruined Cottage* therefore cautions readers to maintain a distance from a narrative of suffering even while they are engaging in the excitement of sympathetic identification. *The Ruined Cottage* and Wordsworth's other Gothic ballads focus, in fact, upon the fates of the listeners who have become so possessed with the Gothic narrative to the point of being unable to separate reality from fiction and this inability to maintain such a separation culminates in the famously Gothic-obsessed Catherine in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (Gamer 111).

Reading "The Rime"'s final stanza in the light of Gamer's interpretation of *The Ruined Cottage* points to Coleridge's attempt to represent the Wedding-Guest as a discriminating Gothic "reader" with whom Coleridge invites his readers to identify. Close to *The Ruined Cottage*'s listener but not similar to him, the Wedding-Guest, while allowing himself to be affected by a tale of suffering, is able to draw a moral lesson from the tale. The line "A sadder and a wiser man" has, indeed, been much debated. It is clear that, after having listened to the suffering tale of the mariner, the Wedding-Guest is so "forlorn" that he "[t]urn[s] from the bridegroom's door" (405) due to, arguably, his strong identification with the mariner's suffering. It appears that allowing ourselves to be affected by a tale of suffering is desirable, at least, according to principles of the cult of sensibility of the mid-century from which Romantic poetry developed. He carries the weight of the mariner's suffering to the point of almost ceasing to be a part of the society. However, the fact that he rises, the next "morrow morn" (405) which generally signifies a sense of hope, a wiser man indicates that he has learned a moral lesson, regardless of what it is, from the tale. In addition, a degree of sadness or gloom either created by listening to a tale of suffering or contemplating death and the graveyard is necessary to acquiring wisdom given Romantic poetry's preoccupation with melancholy developed from the graveyard poetic tradition. To a certain extent, the Wedding-Guest's ability to glean a moral from the tale can be read as Coleridge's subtle criticism of various critics's reviews which attacked the supernatural predilection in this poem. If any moral lesson needs to be drawn, it is, to borrow Gamer's interpretation of *The Ruined Cottage*, "the listener and readers who insert moral value into a tale" (112).

Not only are readers encouraged to ascribe morality to a tale but also, as discriminating readers/listeners, to suspect the teller of a Gothic tale. Gamer's reading of Wordsworth's "The Thorn" and its Note reveals the great extent to which Gothic readers are made to question the narrator (121). In defending his "Gothic" poems, which received negative reviews, in *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth, in his note to "The Thorn" (1800), denied any association with the

Gothic, claiming that, unlike Gothic texts which promoted superstition among the British public, his "Gothic" poems such as "The Thorn", "Goody Blake and Harry Gill" in fact criticise "credulous" people who are prone to superstition. As he wrote in his Note:

> Such men having little to do become credulous and talkative from indolence; and from the same cause, and other predisposing causes by which it is probable that such men may have been affected, they are prone to superstition. On which account it appeared to me proper to select a character like this to exhibit some of the general laws by which superstition acts upon the mind. (37)

Gamer says that this note clearly exposes "the mental operation that produces superstitious belief" (121). Wordsworth's Part Two of "Hart-Leap Well" is a clear example, in that, while Part One narrates the ordinary story of Sir Walter killing the Hart and then erecting three pillars and a well as a commemoration, Part Two begins with the superstitious interpretation of the haunted well by a shepherd. The low and the rustic characters are among those who are prone to indulge in supernatural speculation (Gamer 14).

     Coleridge's ancient mariner can be seen among "[s]uch men" because he is associated with the sea or the realm of imagination and improbability as opposed to the land or the realm of reason. To begin with, the land represents the ordinary and logical world. It is a place where a normal activity like a wedding is being held. The sea is usually associated with the supernatural and inexplicable circumstances. Indeed, a number of strange accounts come from sea voyages. Early in the century, it is not a mere coincidence that Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift chose a sea excursion to allow their characters to go to fantasy places. The contrast between the Wedding Guest from the land and the mariner from the sea is also made at the beginning. The mariner is presented as a "grey-bread Loon" (389) so different from cheerful wedding guest. The mariner is in a place where he does not belong, both literally (as he is not numbered as a wedding guest) and figuratively (as he must wander from place to place). In fact, the mariner who carries with him a supernatural experience, does not belong anywhere on the land; he is, rather, a creature from the sea. The Wedding Guest frequently compares him to the sea telling the mariner, "I fear thy skinny hand;/And thou art long and lank and and brown/ As is the ribb'd Sea-sand" (394). Putting a supernatural tale into the mouth of the mariner can be seen as Coleridge's attempt to appropriate Gothic material.

     The last Gothic appropriation this paper examines is "The Rime"'s place in the ballad genre which gives the poem a sense of the past and a distance from the present. The ballad is a genre or sub-genre implying an oral past. The ballad

carried two principal meanings in Coleridge's time. Old and traditional ballads were "an old song or rhyme dealing with a simple story of adventure… [they] meant to be the product of centuries of oral transmission, unadulterated by fashions or printers" while new ballads were those with "up-to-date social and political comment" and were usually associated with town (Sonmez 34). Ballads became popular because of the eighteenth century interest in the ancient and medieval revival. Throughout the century there was an emergence of a number of ballad collections. One of the most famous was James Macpherson's Ossianic poems collected from ancient Scottish Gaelic ballads. Equally popular was Bishop Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) in which the author claimed to have reproduced the mediaeval and early ballads he had found in a seventeenth-century manuscript folio but, in fact, contained several of his alternations and editions. The extreme case of "editions" was Thomas Chatterton's *The Rowley Poems* which Walpole, rightly, declared a forgery. Dani Zweig concludes that, as early as the eighteenth century, there was a "tendency to cloak new ballads in an appearance of antiquity" (qtd. in Sonmez 34). A poetic ballad is connected with the ancient and the past and is able to "feed into the reader a sense of historical depth, some pervasive sense of the almost mythic power of ancient traditions and traditional tales" (Sonmez 33). "The Rime" was the first poem in the first edition of *Lyric Ballads* (1798), and Sonmez, by citing Dani Zweig's *Early Child Ballads*, observes that whilst "Lucy Gray" and " 'Love', Ellen Irwin" etc., have the qualities of ballads in metre and subject matter, it is "The Rime" which illustrates "a combination of what has become known as a ballad metre, construction, and features of old writing" (42) and thus it is "the only piece in that collection to present itself as the reproduction of an older written tale, the older writing being itself based upon some oral original lost in time" (33).

Archaic language, therefore, was necessary to so ancient a poetic form as the ballad. The archaic language of "The Rime" covers old-fashioned vocabulary ('grey-bread loon'), old verbal endings (–st and –th) and grammatical changes in the form of defunct question and negation ("wherefore stopp'st thou me" and "this body dropt not down"). Sonmez observes that these outdated expressions and words are not historically specific and, by citing Geoffery Leech's *A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry*, notes that, with the exception of a few expressions, they belong to "standard archaic usage" or "the repertoire of archaisms available to poets at any time from 1600 to 1900 and are not based on the style of any one writer" (30). Coleridge's supposed declaration in the Advertisement to the first edition which speaks of the archaic language as "intelligible for [the] […] three centuries" up to 1798, in fact, fails to be identical with the English of the said periods; it only seems like it. In addition, those old-fashioned spellings and verbal endings (rather than old words and expressions) function as visual stimuli in a way that leads the reader to associate

the poem with "a general image of texts from the past". As Sonmez notes: "The poem in this aspect encourages identification *with the past* and leads us at the same time to understand that it is not truly *from the past*" (31).Sonmez further argues that contrary to popular argument made by many commentators who have argued for a considerable alternation and eradication of the archaic language, in fact, "very few formal alterations to the words were made after 1800, and almost none to the archaism" and "a mere nineteen percent" were removed, possibly not by Coleridge but his publisher. The fact that only nineteen percent of the archaic language was removed indicates that it is important to the poem's sense of pastness (32).

Critical Reception and Conclusion

Since Coleridge meant "The Rime" to be well received by critics, it is worthwhile examining the reception the poem received. Published at the height of the Gothic revival, "The Rime"'s supernatural elements were inevitably reviewed against the background of the Gothic and it received a mixed reception and reviews. Southey in the *Critical Review* for October 1798 expressed his disappointment with the supernatural:

> This piece appears to us perfectly original in style as well as in story. Many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful; but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible . . . We do not sufficiently understand the story to analyse it. It is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity. Genius has here been employed in producing a poem of little merit. (200-201)

Richard Holmes elucidates that the "'Dutch' jibe implied a drunken second-rate imitation of Bürger" (12). In other words, "Dutch" is a degrading term used to indicate something confusing and unfathomable and "German sublimity" is a metonym for German Gothic literature, particularly the works of Bürger which greatly influenced Coleridge's Gothic works. In other words, it was a failed attempt to imitate the tradition of German *schauerroman* ("shudder novel"). One reviewer in the *Analytical Review* in 1798 agreed that "'Rime of the ancyent Mariner' [had] more of the extravagance of a mad German poet, than of the simplicity of our ancient ballad writer" (584).

Charles Lamb's letter to Southey expressing his disagreement with Southey's review indicates Coleridge's successful Gothic appropriation, at least in Lamb's judgement, in its emphasis upon the mariner's psychological exploration. In November 1798, Lamb wrote to Southey:

> If you wrote that review in the 'Crit. Rev.', I am sorry that you are sparing of praise of the Ancient Mariner. So far from calling it as you do,

with some wit, but more severity, a "Dutch Attempt," &c., I call it a right English attempt, and a successful one, to dethrone German sublimity. (Fitzgerald 35-36)

Lamb, arguing for "a right English attempt", clearly indicates that "The Rime"'s Gothic elements are "native" or "English" rather than "foreign" or "German". As discussed above, due to its Gothic excess, *The Monk* was considered by readers and critics alike to be "German" whilst Radcliffe's works were more "English" because of their explained supernatural technique and emphasis upon psychological suspense. Radcliffe herself, in "On the Supernatural in Poetry", composed around 1802 and published posthumously in 1826, made the distinction between the Gothic "horror" as represented by *The Monk* and imitations of the German *schauerroman* and the Gothic "terror" as represented by her own rational works and those works attempting to eschew the excesses and the improbabilities of the German school. Southey's "German sublimity", the *Analytical Review*'s "mad German poet" and Lamb's "English attempt" can be understood in this public perception of the Gothic as being "English" or "German". So, Lamb's referring to an "English attempt" points to "The Rime"'s successful emphasis upon the mariner's psychological dimension, thus weakening the preternatural predilections in the poem.

A year later, Wordsworth appeared to share Southey's sentiment when he wrote to Joseph Cottle, in 1799, expressing his disappointment with the Gothic elements of the poem: "From what I can gather it seems that the Ancient Mariner has upon the whole been an injury to the volume, I mean that the old words and the strangeness of it have deterred readers from going on" (qtd. in Gamer 116). Lamb's 1801 letter to Wordsworth however continued to praise the poem:

> For me, I was never so affected with any human tale. After first reading it, I was totally possessed with it for many days. I dislike all the miraculous part of it; but the feelings of the man under the operation of such scenery, dragged me along like Tom Pipe's magic whistle…(Fitzgerald 73).

Lamb clearly admired Coleridge's attention to "the feeling of the man". In other words, he was moved by the psychological exploration of the man under "such scenery". Wordsworth later re-evaluated the poem and, in spite of Coleridge's request to withdraw the poem from the volume, included in the 1800 Edition of *Lyrical Ballad*. Wordsworth, in his note to "The Ancient Mariner" (1800) defended his decision by saying that "the Poem contains many delicate touches of passion, and indeed the passion is everywhere true to nature" (40).

Wordsworth might have felt the same way Lamb did when he talked about "passion". Although Southey and Wordsworth agree upon one point, the extravagance of the Gothic elements that somehow injures the poem, what else can be expected when Coleridge, who found himself poor throughout his life, knew that he could occasionally exploit the Gothic mode in order to earn a living.

Given the popular consensus that the Gothic is a harbinger of the Romantic and the intricate historical relationship between the Gothic and the Romantic in general, we see not only in poems of Coleridge but also in other major Romantic poets, Gothic discourses and elements. David H. Richter sees "[t]he first generation of romantic writers as young adults embarrassed by their familiar relationship to a wealthy but utterly disreputable uncle with libidinous personal habits and dangerous political associations" (587). In order to be "wealthy" and avoid being "disreputable", the Romantic poets saw the necessity of appropriating Gothic material. And this is what this paper has attempted to illustrate. By means of placing what can be called the Gothicised Romantic poem "The Rime" in the context of the 1790s when Gothic literature was so popular among the public but notorious among critical readers, this paper has shown Coleridge's attempt in "The Rime" to appropriate Gothic material in order to gain financial reward and popularity and to avoid critical aspersion. His attempt at such a negotiation reveals the poem's complex treatment of Gothic material.

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