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Glossing the Feminine in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

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I

In a notebook passage from 1806 Coleridge addressed the Sara Hutchinson who inhabited his mind: "O bring my whole nature into balance and harmony" (*CM*, 2:2938. [Nov-Dec 1806]). Now such a plea is interesting only because of what it reveals about the contours and contortions of Coleridge's personal and poetic desire. That is, he was particularly prone throughout his life to turning to women who were self-created, fantastically idealized projections, magical beings who would somehow be able to produce for him the psychic harmony he so desperately sought and never found. But if Coleridge never experienced the love he craved from his mother, and if he rejected his wife and estranged himself from his children, he sought in his poetry to relieve his fears and anxieties by creating a fantastic world where he could duel with the idealized and imaginary forms that his "parents" and love objects took. Alas, one has heard more than one wants about Coleridge's mother, his unhappy marriage, his peculiar infatuations with pathetic women, his strange jealousy of Wordsworth. This essay addresses none of the overly-familiar biographical material on which most psychoanalytical approaches to Coleridge's poetry are usually based. It employs instead a Kristevan perspective-mediated by the writings of Jacob Boehme--to address the meaning and shape of the larger psychic paradigm evidenced in the *Rime*.

On the strange voyage we take as readers of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, we, like the Mariner, confront two eerie female figures the Nightmarish "Life-in-Death" and a beneficent "Mary

Queen." And we cannot fail to note that these two extremely ephemeral women embody between them that most obvious ideological configuration of misogyny: the split woman, a caricature of the virgin/whore syndrome writ in almost cartoonish hand. That no one has until quite recently commented on the strangeness of these women suggests that as readers we have been duped by or at least drawn into the artifice of the Mariner's uncanny fictional universe, made to seem explicable not only by the conventions of the ballad form, but also by the fiendishly deceptive gloss. As Karl Kroeber has noted, the poem's magicity "derives from its presentation of the mysterious as if commonplace; as in genuine ballads the mysterious is taken for granted." But Kroeber, after noting the extreme strangeness of Life-in-Death, makes no attempt to explain her presence or meaning within a poem that he claims is without "intertextual connections."¹

But if the eerie femaleness of Life-in-Death has been glossed over (pun intended), Coleridge's fascination with what has generally been seen as the phallic mother has been the subject of a number of studies that focus both on his biography and his interest in exploding genre conventions. The phallic, consuming, and ultimately castrating mother appears as a sort of leitmotif in Coleridge's poetry because of his intense interest in and ambivalence toward mother-figures, as critics such as Fruman, Ware, and Beres have shown.² I believe, however, that the most obvious example of the (buried) mother's power in Coleridge's major poetry can be found in his treatment of the dual-visaged feminine in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, a work that displaces and yet at the same time depicts the tortures of the family romance. But if to invoke psychoanalytical terms when discussing Coleridge has long been commonplace, it has not been generally recognized that the theories of Julia Kristeva, particularly her revision of Lacan's notion of the Imaginary—the Semiotic—can provide another avenue into the poem.³

According to Kristeva, "No language can sing unless it confronts the Phallic Mother." For Kristeva, the mother's split identity originated for Western culture in the cult of the Lady, a hieroglyphic semiotic practice that inscribes "a conjunctive disjunction of the two sexes as irreducibly differentiated and, at the same time, alike." Further, the increasing dominance of the sign (nondisjunction) over the symbol (conjunction) produced for Western culture a "centered system (Other,

Woman) whose center is there only so as to permit those making up the Same (Man, Author) to identify with it." The reduction of Woman to sign signifies the culture's need to erase disjunction (sexual difference) by either excluding her as the Other or by dissolving her into a series of images (from the angel to the Virgin) that can be opposed to or assimilated by the Same. But in such a culture Woman can only be a "blind center," possessing no value in herself; that is, she can exist only as an object of exchange among members of the Same. Kristeva labels this complex of gestures "devalorizing valorization," a mode of explicit devaluation of women that first systematically appeared in fourteenth-century bourgeois literature (in *fabliaux*, *soties*, *farces*).⁴

The Romantic poet-hero as Same exists within the text, then, as his own self-created fantasy of the consuming artist, empowered by swallowing and introjecting the power of the (M)Other. According to Kristeva,

What we take for a mother, and all the sexuality that the maternal image commands, is nothing but the place where rhythm stops and identity is constituted... [The poet's] oracular discourse, split (signifier/signified) and multiplied (in its sentential and lyrical concatenations), carries the scar of not merely the *trauma* but also the *triumph* of his battle with the Phallic Mother... The war, however, is never over and the poet shall continue indefinitely to measure himself against the mother, against his mirror-image—a partially reassuring and regenerative experience, a partially castrating, legislating and socializing ordeal. (DL. 193)

Kristeva revises Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real, by claiming that the pre-oedipal mother is largely concealed in Western discourse because she is the embodiment of the power of the "semiotic" within the realm of the Imaginary—the archaic choral, matriarchal tradition. The pre-oedipal mother also opposes the oedipal father in her relation to the origins of discourse. Throughout her writings Kristeva, following Lacan here, defines the realm of the Symbolic as the "Name-of-the-Father," the point at which language acquired meaning, signification, and representation through the power of the Father and the threat of castration. In opposition to

the Symbolic order, Kristeva places the Imaginary/semiotic, with its "uncertain and indeterminate articulation," the babble of infants and the anti-representational maternal chora. The power of woman as semiotic Other, however, has most often been elided by the ideological construction of the "symbolic" Mother, acceptable to the patriarchy because her sexuality has been harnessed and defined by the male child Jesus in her arms. In other words, access to the pre-oedipal mother is possible only through the oedipal world of the Father, for he stands as both a blocking figure as well as a mediator between mother and son.⁵

Because he was writing under the Name-of-the-Father, in allegiance to the patriarchy, Coleridge was compelled to depict the mother as the text's completely marginalized figure, an emblem of complete difference, a fantasy of subversion.⁶ But Coleridge knew all too well what sort of psychic power the mother possessed, for even in her absence she could continue to be a disruptive and continually persistent sign of textual subversion. He knew that even as an absence she threatened the system of the Father, the Symbolic/phallic, the Law, the powers of representation. To bring her into the text as a coopted figure was to mitigate her strength, and so Coleridge has the mother make two brief cameo appearances in the text as either a sign, a trace (the phallic "Life-in-Death") or a symbol, a patriarchal ideal ("Mary Queen"). But in either guise he makes her disappear as quickly as she is evoked. For Coleridge, the mother in either of her manifestations could afford to be only a talismanic presence. In creating "Life-in-Death" Coleridge depicted what Kristeva has called the "Abjected" woman, the Medusa-aspect of the semiotic, the fetishistic, hystericized female as Other. Such a woman can only signify the male's fantasies about castration at the hands of the mother, while the reverse is true of "Mary Queen." Here we clearly discern the woman as the symbol of the Lady, virginal/disembodied idea, the woman as image/commodity to be consumed, the woman who herself is castrated, powerless to do anything but selflessly fulfill the poet's needs.

II

But if Kristeva's theories form a sort of external supratext to Coleridge's poem, what constitutes the internal subtext? I would claim that the writings of Jacob Boehme do, along with Coleridge's own

marginal notations to the same. Coleridge's obsession with Boehme's works represents his attempt to write, like Boehme, in the Name-of-the-Father, as a sort of divinely inspired prophet. But the voice that emerged from Boehme—so certain and self-assured—finally endorsed the power of the Mother as the most primal and potent, and such a voice could only frighten and be rejected ultimately by Coleridge. But from Boehme Coleridge inherited the language and images that inform a good deal of *The Rime*. That is, a vision of trinity struggles in *The Rime* with a vision of duality, and such a perspective originated for Coleridge in his reading of Boehme. The three wedding guests who are detained by the mariner in the beginning of the poem are mirrored at the conclusion by the three figures in the boat who appear in Part VII. Groups of three, then, alternate with radically binary couples—the sun and the moon, Life-in-Death and Death—and between all of these pairings moves the solitary figure of the mariner, a monistic figure who must somehow reconcile multiplicity in the universe with his monomaniacal drive for unity of being and vision.

But the search for psychic unity, what Coleridge called "balance and harmony," is as illusory as the search for the idealized mother and father of his imaginings—a lesson that, unfortunately, the mariner learns too late. Coleridge has the mariner enact a psychodrama that in turn mirrors Coleridge's own struggle with "split" parental figures and the nature of mind/language itself. In his attempts to mediate sign and symbol, semiotic and patriarchal, Coleridge was poetically examining his own philosophical compulsions: "The REASON without being either the SENSE, the UNDERSTANDING or the IMAGINATION contains all three within itself, even as the mind contains its thoughts, and is present in and through them all; or as the expression pervades the different features of an intelligent countenance" (CW 6:69-70).

To say that Coleridge was obsessed with reconciling opposites and dualities throughout his poetic and philosophical works is simply to state the obvious. I want to claim instead that the imagistic conflicts that recur in *The Rime* are mirrored in Coleridge's philosophical writings, particularly those that concern the basic contradiction between the reconciliation of binary oppositions and the principle of organic unity. Coleridge described this principle as "neither whole nor part, but unity as boundless or endless allness—the sublime," or what Freud has called the sense of "oceanic" immersion in the mother's body. But achieving this sense of the sublime was possible only if the

conflict between head and heart, elsewhere identified by Coleridge as the masculine and the feminine, could be resolved. In one letter Coleridge claimed: "A Poet's *Heart & Intellect* should be *combined, intimately combined & unified*, with the great appearances in Nature— & not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal Similies" (Coleridge's italics). He was even blunter in another letter: "Believe me Southey! a metaphysical solution that does not instantly tell you something in the heart is grievously to be suspected as apocryphal." His ethical system was, in fact, based on his belief that reason and emotion had to be balanced: "The great business of real unostentatious virtue is-not to eradicate any genuine instinct or appetite of human nature; but-to establish a concord and unity betwixt all parts of our nature, to give a feeling and a passion to our purer intellect, and to intellectualize our feelings and passions."⁷

Now we recognize such sentiments as part and parcel of the androgynous ideology that so permeated late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Europe. And as several critics have noted, the primary philosophical influence on Coleridge's depiction of androgyny was his readings in the writings of Boehme.⁸ Throughout his marginalia comments on the writings of Boehme, Coleridge evinces an obsessive need to understand the nature and function of duality, whether those dualities are discussed as "Thesis & Antithesis," light and sound, fire and water, oxygen and hydrogen, or other variations. In short, Coleridge was as obsessed as Boehme was with dichotomies. In one marginal notation he observes:

The dilative Force was balanced by the contractive—the attractive by the self-repulsive—thus the two powers, the Superficial, and the Central, were each balanced in its polar forces, and then became sexual Opposites.⁹

In another marginal comment on Boehme, Coleridge remarks that "Attraction, Contraction, Repulsion and Dilation" are "the elementary Powers" that ultimately produce "Synthesis" (641). Coleridge calls the oscillation between these four forces Boehme's "Cosmotheism," but then he revises his understanding of Boehme to see not four, but three primary powers—attraction, repulsion, and gravitation. He calls each of these forces "monas" and states: "the law of polarity generates the Dyad (=2), itself remaining, or representing itself by, the Indifference-

point, (=3) whence 1=3, or the Triad" (643). From a vision of four primary powers, Coleridge was compelled to claim that there were only three powers, and then finally that there were only two. And we can recognize this radically dualistic vision, of course, as inhabiting the realm of (sexual) binary oppositions.

Coleridge once observed that when he first began to study Boehme he had much "in common with Newton, Kant, Schelling, Steffens ... [and] had assumed four primary forces"-attraction, repulsion, positive and negative electricity," with "Gravitation as the *Offspring* of the synthesis." But after reading Boehme, Coleridge claimed to recognize "two *primary* forces only, Attraction and Contraction" (660). Significantly, these two forces are imaged by Boehme as the "Father" and "Mother," constituting Boehme's notion of the divine. Coleridge states in a marginal notation that for Boehme

There is no union but of Opposites, = the Law of Polarity—and the Converse follows by the Law of Identity—viz. There are no Opposites without a common principle—or the essence of all opposites. ...Now that which each opposite seeks in the other [as its own essence &] in which seeking consists the tendency to union, Behmen entitles THE MOTHER, that because that which appears to seek or to take the active part requiring a masculine character implies the feminine or passive in that which [is] sought. (662)

But Coleridge came to reject Boehme's radical vision of a polarized deity and, by implication, a polarized psyche. Coleridge condemns Boehme for placing "the polarities *in* the Deity, mak[ing] them eternal, confounding, first, Correspondents with opposites, and *then* Opposites with Contraries....Thus the proper Deity becomes the Proserpine! having a dark *Source*. In short, Behmen remains, I fear and as far as I have hitherto read, a Cabiric Physiotheist" (678). The source for Coleridge's rejection of Boehme, then, ostensibly resides in Boehme's valorization of the feminine Proserpine! Persephone, the dark maternal force that drags her young with her into the underworld depths of fertility fed by death. We are reminded here of Kristeva's observation that "it is within the economy of signification itself that the questionable subject-in-process appropriates to itself this archaic, instinctual, and maternal territory; thus it simultaneously prevents the

word from becoming mere sign and the mother from becoming an object like any other-forbidden" (DL, 136). But the mother does become an object, a sign in Coleridge's poem, and as such she has to be tabooed. This fear of and ambivalence toward the maternal erupts openly in *The Rime*, where Coleridge poetically tries both to resolve his philosophical interests in bipolar oppositions at the same time he struggles to create the fantasized escape of his mariner into a radically monistic self. But this monistic self is not formed from the harmonious merger of masculine and feminine; he is a totally masculine creation, the dream of a man who longed to escape the mother altogether. The failure of the mariner to flee into his own totally created masculine realm of mind is caused ultimately by his inability to accept the reality of the mother as anything other than castrating/castrated.

III

When the mariner approaches the group of three wedding guests, he begins his routine by cornering one and compulsively, repetitiously telling his tale (we can only guess how many times he has told it in the past, how many times he will tell it again). This repetition—compulsion is the clearest indication we have that there is no linguistic (not to mention psychic) salvation for the mariner. But more to the point, let's begin by examining this more than twice-told tale.¹⁰ The poem has a purposeful "once upon a time" quality as it begins by describing the original journey's departure from this same town in a distant but uncertain past. The ship (which in a *Notebook* entry [3, 484] Coleridge compared to "the human soul") sets off "Merrily" and passes the "kirk," the "hill," and the "lighthouse" (l. 22-24). These same three landmarks recur again in VI. 465 -66, as the mariner returns and struggles to recognize what they represent—institutionalized religion in the social community, the "feminized" natural world, and the "masculine" realm of objects, man-made constructions that assist us in mastering that natural world. The mariner's journey is meant to uproot and question these very basic realities of spiritual, natural, and human life so that the mariner can return with a completely transformed perspective. But the mariner's journey, ostensibly into Culture and his own attempt to create himself as a Culture Hero, is also a journey within himself, an internal psychic quest, caused by his need to confront and harmonize the father and mother of his self-created oedipal fantasies. The ballad can be read as

a family romance in which the hero alternately perceives "split" parents, cartoonish good and evil figures. In this version of the family romance he commits a crime against the "father" and then confronts the two forms that the fantasized "mother" has taken within his psyche. The poem can be understood, that is, as a poetic response to Boehme's philosophical system, a (re)creative statement from an angry son who ultimately condemns the mother as Prosperine, the dark source of all human life.

The mariner begins his tale in what he represents to us as a radically sexed universe: "The Sun came up upon the left, / Out of the sea came he! / And he shone bright" (l. 25-27). The masculine sun presides over the mariner's voyage, rising "Higher and higher every day. / Till over the mast at noon—" (l. 29-30) it intersects with the cross of the mast to form the first ambivalently complex sexual sign in the poem. The masculine sun intersecting the phallic mast portends a world in which man-made objects and masculine symbols have usurped the power of the feminine, natural realm. It is a world that has denied the feminine, a world where men and male hegemony exist in splendid isolation from the tempering influence of the feminine. This world is further dominated by a "STORM-BLAST," which is clearly imaged as yet another masculine figure: "He" is "tyrannous and strong" and chases the ship to the south (l. 41-4). This masculine force leads the ship/soul to the land of ice, frozen sterility, a place where no "shapes of men nor beasts" can be seen because "the ice was all between" (l. 57-8). This ice realm is reminiscent of Blake's Ulro, a state of mind and a locus in which life and growth—not to mention the feminine—are denied.

In the midst of this extremely sterile seascape, the Albatross appears: "As if it had been a Christian soul, / We hailed it in God's name" (l. 65-6). The albatross's association with the Logos, the power and source of language, clearly associates it with the Name-of-the-Father, the masculine powers of symbolic logic and knowledge. But the albatross has traditionally been seen as a feminine and maternal figure because it provides nourishment and inspiration to both the sailors and Nature, while its appearance allows the ship to escape its stagnation: "The ice did split with a thunder-fit; / The helmsman steered us through!" (l. 69-70). The initially negative masculine world is momentarily shattered by the bird and immediately a "good south wind" sends the boat into the "white Moon-shine" (l. 71; 78). But it is

also possible to see the albatross as the embodiment of the fantasized good father who suddenly emerges, as if from the depths of the psyche, while the mariner is physically immersed in the realm of the "evil" father. The albatross is, after all, hailed in "God's name," an allusion that recalls the masculine powers of Logos, the Mosaic burning bush, the great "I AM" of Coleridge's own theory of the imagination. The first part of the poem, then, places the mariner in the realm of the patriarch in both his guises—the icy realm of the Law and the patriarch and the beneficent appearance of the Father God as Christ, loving and feminized son. The mariner chooses to destroy this world in an abruptness that shocks—even in the retelling—the wedding guest and the mariner himself. He uses his cross-bow, another ambivalent phallic image, to kill the albatross, a parricide against the best imaginings of a father that his own mind could create.¹¹

And although the parricide of the albatross is a crime against both Nature and Culture, the crew accepts the deed with a few grumblings and, under the inspiration of the sun, even goes so far as to see the bird as the cause of the fog and mist (II. 97-102). The rationalization is twofold here, for not only do the men conveniently forget about the ice (the fog and mist were originally perceived as good omens to direct the boat out of the ice world), but the men also project what they fear is their own negative fate onto an innocent natural object. That is, rather than take responsibility for having entered the world of the icy patriarch in the first place, they seek a scapegoat—a Christ-figure—to blame for their sojourn there. The sun as masculine avenging force this time descends on the crew causing the winds to disappear, leaving the ship "As idle as a painted ship / Upon a painted ocean" (II. 117-8). The mariner himself bemoans the lack of water and reveals his distorted perception of the natural world by seeing the sea as rotten, filled with "slimy things" that crawl about in a realm of rot (II. 122-6). These snakes have been traditionally interpreted as representing the power of the phallic mother, while the mariner's rejection of them supposedly signifies his ambivalence toward the mother's sexual functions as procreator.¹² But the snakes can also be seen as the mariner's projected fears about his own masculinity, a fear he attempted to escape and abort by parricide. The snake as phallus functions as an objective correlative for the mariner's castration anxieties, as well as his guilt for negating the father both without and within him.

Part II ends with the same abruptness as did Part I, but this time the mariner's sin is reduced to a sign. The dead albatross is hung "Instead of the cross" -another phallic emblem-around the mariner's neck (II. 141- 2). The transformations are now complete. The mast was transformed into a cross-bow and then a cross and finally into a dead bird. Each of these imagistic transformations attempts to distance the power of the patriarch, the Law, from the son struggling to define himself in an overwhelmingly threatening world. He has chosen to kill the beneficent father/son and finds himself then returned to the world of the evil father, the slimy snakes. He has ended his oedipal rage in impotent self-destruction, and finds himself reduced to drinking his own blood. The collective guilt of parricide has been shared by all the men on the ship who, like the mariner, are literally dumb, silenced by tongues that are "withered at the root" and "choked with soot" (II. 136, 138). The mariner finds his voice, at the cost of his own blood, in order to cry with joy at the approach of a sail (III. 160-1). But joy soon turns to dread as the mariner realizes that the ship approaching must be some sort of phantom aberration, for it is able to move with neither tide nor wind. The mother has finally appeared in the son's fantasy, but just as the father had appeared as a split figure, so too does the mother seem both full of fury and full of grace.

IV

The two figures who inhabit the mysterious ship are recognized immediately and, one must conclude, intuitively by the mariner. Without introductions he knows that he is in the company of Death ("The naked hulk") and Life-in-Death ("she, / Who thicks man's blood with cold"). This woman is nothing less than the Coleridgean version of Boehme's dark Prosperine, the mother who can deliver only on the promise of death to her children. These two fearsome figures have been dicing for the life of the mariner and the woman has won; it would appear that it is now time for the mariner to confront the fearful female—the mother as Medusa, abjected and abjecting. But as Kristeva has observed, when the son attempts to move from the Imaginary to the Symbolic realms he often experiences "hallucinatory metaphor, fear and fascination, abjection-at the crossroads of phobia, obsession, and perversion." That is, when the male ego confronts the mother as a "bad object" he turns from her and cleanses himself of contact with her by "vomiting." And so why does Coleridge present

"Life-in-Death" as such an appalling figure? In fact, why does he make no attempt to conceal his sexual nausea, his dread of contact with such a being: "*Her lips were red, her lips were free, / Her locks were yellow as gold: / Her skin was as white as leprosy*" (III. 190-93). The mariner is clearly in the grip of abjected dread of the mother's body; he has no choice but to see her as uncanny, fetishistic, hystericized, because he can only project his own anxieties onto her. Kristeva clarifies this compulsion by noting:

Abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship, in the immemorial violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be.... I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and stead of what will be 'me.' Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be. ¹³

The mariner's struggle has been (at least in his own mind) a struggle to become "human," and as we know, such an effort is always a mimetic one, based on our attempts to become homologous to another. We need, that is, to experience ourselves as primary, even though we know that we are chronologically secondary to someone else (the mother). "I" come into being, then, only as I separate, reject, ab-ject the mother, only as I seek to emerge out of primary narcissism and into a symbolic relationship with another. Coleridge's creation of the overly-determined "Life-in-Death" tropes not only his own anxiety about separating from the mother, but also the mariner's intense struggle to come into some sort of psychic individuality.

Immediately after this abortive confrontation with "Life-in-Death" the sun disappears, the night descends, and the spectre ship disappears. The whole episode has about it the quality of a dream, a sort of masochistic wish-fulfillment in which the mariner imagines the worst sort of event only to reify it. The mariner is now in the world of the phallic mother, presided over by the "horned Moon, with one bright star / Within the nether tip" (III, 210-11). His two hundred shipmates are the first casualties in this world, sacrifices to the mariner's monomania and solipsism. In the realm of the patriarch the other men had functioned with him as a sort of band of brothers, fellow sons/conspirators in the necessary parricide. But in the world of the

(M)Other, the mariner wants no competition. His "brothers," like his father, are slain by his own desire to possess the mother totally.

Part IV, the center of the poem, contains the crucial movement toward fictional salvation because it presents the mariner's first tentative gestures toward reconciling his split psyche, the blessing of the water-snakes under the inspiration of the maternal moon. But before he can come to this moment of blessing, he has to recognize that adherence to the world of the phallic Mother as well as the evil Father has led to the denial of life, for the mariner sees his dead comrades as "beautiful," and at the same time curses the living creatures of the sea as "slimy things" (IV, 236-9). In thrall as he is to the power of negativity within him, the mariner sees only beauty in the dead and only ugliness in the living. Such is the curse of the dehumanized and denaturalized imagination cut off from its origins in the semiotic/maternal. He cannot pray for release; his heart is "dry as dust," and so he finally closes his eyes in a futile attempt to block out all external reality (IV, 244-8). Every time the mariner opens his eyes, however, he sees the cursing eyes of his dead brother-sailors, eyes mirroring eyes in an endless repetition of voyeuristic jealousy, narcissistic frenzy. The moon, as a clearly positive maternal presence now, transforms the mariner's perception of the natural world so that he is able to see the water-snakes as not only alive, but beautiful. Without consciously trying to save himself, in fact, by suspending his intellect and will and allowing his emotions to emerge, the mariner is suddenly filled with a "spring of love," and he blesses the snakes "unaware" (the word is repeated twice: IV, 285, 287).

The maternal moon as idealized mother has presided here as emblem, guide, and intercessor for the mariner's attempt to combine his fantasized "masculine" and "feminine" elements of being. In creating a harmonious self that can embrace the fiction of the "good" parents within himself, the mariner momentarily achieves a self-created balance between the power of the good mother and the good father. When this harmony occurs, the father/albatross drops from the mariner's neck, and the mariner is able to enter a world presided over by beneficent feminine imagery. "Mary Queen," suddenly appearing like an eruption of the "good mother" in the text, sends "the gentle sleep from Heaven," a regressive condition that allows the mariner to slip into dreams of rain, a rebirth for both his body and his spirit. One is reminded here of Coleridge's observation to his son that "after God's

name, the name of Mother is the sweetest and most holy" (*CL*, 3:2 [7 Feb 1807]) or the even more revealing statement: "A good Father speaks to us in *nomine Dei*; a Mother in *numine*" (*Notebook F*, f. 97 [8 Aug 1827]). That is, the father inhabits the realm of the Symbolic, the locus of language, empty significations, figurations, all of them substitutes for the "good" mother herself. This mother, at least according to both the domestic and Kristevan ideologies, embodies the semiotic, the Imaginary, life itself. Her sheer ontology precludes the need for language.

The mariner's dreams of rebirth become reality when the moon leads his ship to winds and these give way to rain and lightning. The restorative rain reanimates the dead crew members and they assume their familiar duties so that the ship is able to move once more. But the crew members are not actual men; they are projected competitors for the mother, and, as such, they accomplish their task and disappear. The dream-like, surreal quality of everyone and everything—except the mariner's psyche—is particularly pronounced at this point. The ship/soul is next presided over by another "spirit," which the gloss identifies as the "lonesome Spirit from the south-pole." It would appear that this spirit actually represents the spectre of solipsism that preys upon the psyche at the point that it reaches toward the maternal. The impulse to regress into womb-like isolation with the mother is bound up with the nearly identical compulsion to be self-sufficient. The impossibility and danger of such psychic withdrawal, however, is demonstrated almost immediately as the masculine sun once again appears, intersecting with the mast. This repeated emblem of phallic power now assumes blatantly destructive force as the mast falls suddenly down onto the mariner, knocking him unconscious. Ignoring or attacking the power of the father has proved to be costly indeed for the mariner. We could even go so far as to claim that at this point in the text the signifier has the power to assault the signified.

While in a state of semi-consciousness, the mariner overhears the spirits determine that he has yet to do more penance for his crime. The voices of the spirits here and in Part IV function as dissociated aspects of the mariner's own mind, the masochistic forces within him that will not allow him to forgive himself for his parricide. Part IV, however, predominately uses feminine imagery in a restorative and nurturing manner. The gracious moon leads the ship to safety amid

gentle weather and calm nights. But although he appears to be lulled into a sort of womb-like safety, the mariner still cannot escape the consequences of his crimes. He is confronted once again by his dead brother/comrades, the emblems of his jealousy and solipsism. But suddenly, inexplicably, the "spell was snapt" and the mariner once again is able to avert his face from the dead to the "ocean green" (VI, 442-3). This episode repeats in virtually identical form the scene where the mariner blessed the snakes, although there the forgiveness was given to the phallic father and now the blessing is being given to the green ocean as maternal fertility. This episode, while clearly a repetition with a difference, sees the mariner comparing himself to someone on a "lonesome road" who dreads turning around because he fears that a fiend is following him (VI, 446-51). This "fiend," in fact, has been following the mariner throughout the poem. He is the mariner's second-self, his solipsistic double, his doppelgänger, the spirit within that will not release the mariner from his obsessive pursuit of the family romance. He knows that his parricidal mania and flight from the maternal have led to solipsism and despair, and yet he will not admit that the solution lies in accepting and introjecting the "good" parental images, in reconciling sign and symbol.

V

The wind immediately stirs and somewhat too conveniently sends the mariner back to his home—with its once-familiar kirk, hill, and lighthouse. But upon seeing these landmarks, the mariner asks, "Is this mine own countree?" (VI, 467), suggesting that the psychic experience he has undergone has altered forever his perceptions of both the external and the internal worlds. The mariner is next confronted with another triple group—the pilot, the pilot's boy, and the hermit. A traditional and too convenient symbol of the trinity, the mariner reaches out to the hermit hoping that the hermit will "shrieve my soul, he'll wash away / The Albatross's blood" (VI, 512-13). But the powers of the patriarchy cannot forgive a crime against the father, and such a release from sin cannot be given. Part VII reads, then, as an attack on the ineffectuality of institutionalized patriarchal religion, while at its conclusion we are presented with one of the most famous pietistic platitudes in Romantic literature. As this "trinity" approaches the boat and sees its condition, they are terrified and the mariner is once again speechless; he cannot save himself or even cry out for

help. Again, we are in the realm of dream and wish-fulfillment when the boat with its dead crew suddenly sinks and only the mariner survives: "My body lay afloat; / But swift as dreams, myself I found / Within the Pilot's boat" (VII, 553-5). Conveniently, all traces of the mariner's sin have vanished. Instead of receiving comfort from the "trinity," however, the mariner finds that the pilot collapses in a fit; the hermit sits and prays; the boy raves in madness. Such a description reminds one of Blake's vision of an ineffectual trinity of male "Gods," victims themselves of the warfare of genital sexuality. Ironically, the mariner who had hoped to be magically transported to safety finds himself rowing the boat to shore.

Once on the shore the mariner intuitively learns what form his penance will take. He is forced periodically to tell his tale to a particular "face" (VII, 588). In direct contrast to the wedding as a symbol of harmonized duality, the mariner offers to his victims the image of walking together to the kirk "With a goodly company" (VII, 604). It is as if the mariner knows that for him there can only be safety in numbers. He is condemned to live in the world of multiplicity, forever excluded from the power of duality that Coleridge philosophically endorsed. The repetition-compulsion, the act of telling over and over again the same story of parricide and maternal desertion, contradicts the message of divine love that the mariner purports to offer. If humanity is saved by grace alone, why does Coleridge emphasize compulsive penance and vengeance by the spirits of Nature throughout the poem? We pray, Coleridge seems to suggest, by moving our lips and stating once again a story that has been told to us and that we tell again each time we pray. God is, in this version, a stem linguistic taskmaster who compels us to repeat over and over in a community exercise our belief that evil in ourselves and others can never be obliterated.

In his use of Boehmistic imagery Coleridge suggests that the human psyche is compelled to construct artificial paradigms that allow one the illusion of control and design in an essentially chaotic world with only one certain reality—death. And although my use of Kristeva may seem ephemeral, I believe that her schema, another of those bourgeois attempts to provide order to the amorphous thing we call the psyche, actually provides a useful paradigm for understanding the mariner's psychic progression and final position. In his confusion between sign and symbol and in his final penance—the endless telling

of narrative—Coleridge seems to suggest that the mariner is trapped forever in the realm of the linguistic, in patriarchal language, in contrast to the recognition of the power of the "good" maternal that he has ostensibly experienced.

The Rime gains its poetic power from our perception that it concerns a mythic struggle between binary forces: the sun, the albatross, and death as masculine forces contending with the equally ambiguous and split figures of Life-in-Death and Mary Queen. There is, then, no "balance and harmony" except for the brief blessings that occur and are later repudiated in the text. The fragmented mind of the mariner has been the focus of these warring elements of the poem, but no redeemed psyche emerges from his trials. Coleridge suggests in this poem that "Reason," what we would recognize as the ideology of imaginative apotheosis, is impossible; there can be no successful resolution of multiplicity, no fantasized flight into monism. In denying the father, abjecting the mother, and confusing sign and symbol, the mariner ends in a psychic and linguistic limbo from which there was, ultimately, no escape.

Notes

1. See J. Robert Barth, S. J., "Love in Coleridge's Life," in *Coleridge and the Power of Love* (Columbia: U of Missouri P, 1988), pp. 25-41; Geoffrey Yarlott, *Coleridge and the Abyssinian Maid* (London: Methuen, 1967); and Karl Kroeber, "Mariner's Rime to Freud's Uncanny," in *Romantic Fantasy and Science Fiction* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1988), pp. 72-3; Martin Wallen, "Return and Representation: The Revisions of 'The Ancient Mariner,'" *Studies in Romanticism* 17 (1986), 148-56. Jonathan Arac helpfully traces the history of *Rime* criticism in "Repetition and Exclusion: Coleridge and the New Criticism Reconsidered," in *Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies* (New York: Columbia UP, 1987) pp 81-95.
2. See, for instance, Norman Fruman, who reads Life-in-Death as "the mother whom the poet has killed in his phantasy, and whom he must again restore to life" in *Coleridge: The Damaged Archangel* (New York: Braziller, 1971), p. 106; J. Garth Ware claims that Coleridge was fixated on the phallic woman throughout his life and that he never overcame his early "fixation on [the] mother-child or-infant relations" (see his

"Coleridge's Great Poems Reflecting the Mother Imago" *American Imago*, 18 [1961], 331-52); David Beres follows Ware *in* seeing Coleridge as "an ever-demanding infant" because of his unresolved ambivalence toward his mother (see his "A Dream, A Vision, and A Poem: A Psychoanalytic Study of the Origins of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*. 22 (1951]. 97-116). Thomas McFarland has also analyzed Coleridge's ambivalence toward his mother in *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981), pp. 113-18, as has Beverly Fields in her *Reality's Dark Dream: Dejection in Coleridge* (Oberlin: Kent State UP, 1967).

3. For some recent critiques of Kristeva's theories of the maternal. See Ann R. Jones. "Julia Kristeva on Femininity: The Limits of a Semiotic Politics," *Feminist Review* 18 (1984), 56-73; Domna C. Stanton. "Difference on Trial: A Critique of the Maternal Metaphor in Cixous, Irigary, and Kristeva." in *The Poetics a/Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia UP. 1986). 157-82; Jane Gallop. "The Phallic Mother: Freudian Analysis," in *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982), 113-31; and Richard Klein, "In the Body of the Mother," *Enclitic*, 7 (1983), 66-75.
4. See Julia Kristeva. "The Novel as Polylogue," and "The Bounded Text," in *Desire in Language* (DL), ed. Léon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Léon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1980), pp. 191; 49-51.
5. For the best summary of Lacan's position, see Fredric Jameson. "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject." in *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977), 338-95. Kristeva's revision of Lacan can be found throughout her writings, but particularly in her "From One Identity to Another." in *Desire in Language*, pp. 136-40.
6. I disagree with Marlon Ross, who sees Coleridge as the marginalized figure in this poem, particularly in relation to Wordsworth. For Ross, Wordsworth's centrality in the poem is problematic, and "places Coleridge in a position similar to, but not equal to, the marginal female. For, unlike the female, Coleridge wants to claim for himself a kind of tragic heroism in marginality. It is the tragedy of influence, the tragedy that only

- a male can experience, since only a male can be cast out of his originally ordained state of masculine influence and be forced into exile in the land of feminine subjection, marginality, and echoing silence.- (See his *Contours of Masculine Desire* [New York: Oxford UP. 1989]. p. 95).
7. Coleridge, *Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. T. Allsop (1836), 197; *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), II, 864; *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Ernest H. Coleridge (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1895), I. 428; *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (Cambridge: Harvard up. 1936), 255.
 8. For a fuller elaboration of androgynous ideology, see my *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park: Penn State UP, 1990). And for some critical discussions of Coleridge's theories of reconciling oppositions, generally agreed to be a dominant impulse in his corpus, see the discussion in Edward Kessler, *Coleridge's Metaphors of Being* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1979); Jean Watson, "Coleridge's Androgynous Ideal," in *Prose Studies*, 6 (1983), 36-56; Gordon McKenzie, *Organic Unity in Coleridge* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1939); Owen Barfield, *What Coleridge Thought* (Middletown: Wesleyan UP, 1971); James V. Baker, *The Sacred River: Coleridge's Theory of the Imagination* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 1957); and Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon. 1969).
 9. For Coleridge's marginalia to Boehme's works, see *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Marginalia, vol. 1*, ed. George Whalley (Princeton: Bollingen, 1980), p. 623. DeQuincy gave Coleridge the William Law edition of Boehme's works in February, 1808, although Coleridge claims to have read at least the *Aurora* much earlier, while a student at school. See Richard Haven, *Patterns of Consciousness: An Essay on Coleridge* (Amherst U of Massachusetts P, 1969), pp. 89-96, for a fuller discussion of Coleridge's study of Boehme.
 10. *Coleridge: Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest H. Coleridge, 2 vols. (London: Oxford UP, 1912). All quotations from "The Rime" will be from this edition, with line numbers in parentheses in the text.

11. Beres sees the killing of the albatross as an act of matricide, (see above, p, 111), and using H. A. Bunker's work on "Mother-Murder in Myth and Legend," (*Psychiatry Quarterly*, 13 [1944]) postulates that matricide is perceived by the unconscious as incest with the mother. For diametrically opposed readings, see Leon Waldoff, "The Quest for Father and Identity in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*," *Psychoanalytic Review*, 58 (1971), 439-53; Joseph C. Sitterson, Jr. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Freudian Dream Theory," *Papers in Language and Literature*, 18 (1982), 17-35; and David Miall, "Guilt and Death: The Predicament of The Ancient Mariner," *Studies in English literature* 24 (1984), 633-53.
12. See, for instance, Elder Olsen, "A Symbolical Reading of the *Ancient Mariner*," *Modern Philology*, 45 (1948): Robert P. Warren, "A Poem of Pure Imagination," in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (New York: 1946): Anca Vlaspolos. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner as Romantic Quest." *Wordsworth Circle*, 10 (1979). 365-9; Douglas Angus, "'The Theme of Love and Guilt in Coleridge's Three Major Poems,'" *JEGP*, 59 (1960), 655-68; Milton Teichman. "The Marriage Metaphor in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 73 (1969), 40-8; Abe Delson, "The Symbolism of the Sun and Moon in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*." *TSLL*, 15 (1974) 207-20; and Elliott Gose, "Coleridge and the Luminous Gloom: An Analysis of the 'Symbolical Language' in the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*:" *PMLA*, 75 (1960), 238-44.
13. Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Léon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), pp. 45, 10. In contrast to Kristeva's reading, see Mario L. D'Avanzo. "'Her Looks Were Free': The Ancient Mariner and the Harlot," *English Language Notes* 17 (1980), 185-89. And note that Coleridge's associations "Life-in-Death" and "Mary-Queen" with water bear an uncanny resemblance to the discussion of both female images in Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, volume 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).