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BINDING THE MARINER'S CRAFT: ON THE ALIENATED SPEECH OF REVOLUTION IN SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE'S "THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER"

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

BY

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ABSTRACT

BINDING THE MARINER'S CRAFT: ON THE ALIENATED SPEECH OF REVOLUTION IN SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE'S "THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER"

BY DAVID GAMBOA

This thesis aims to understand the motivations behind the form of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"—to find the reason behind the Mariner's rhyme. The first phase of this exploration considers Coleridge's contribution to the question of form-content continuity and culminates in a hypothesis that drives the rest of the paper: that though Coleridge's location of poetic language as above nature participates in the view that form-content continuous poems (poems crafted exclusively in the realm of language) cannot exist as interrelated to nature, such a displacement of language fundamentally misconstrues the premises of mysticism Coleridge hybridizes it with. Namely, I consider Coleridge's misuse of Jacob Boehme's "The Seven Forms of Spirits" model.

The remainder of the thesis analyzes "The Ancient Mariner" with two goals in mind: 1) to propose that Coleridge's displacement of language outside of nature catalyzes the disjunctions between form and content that render the poem's verse so unregulated; and 2) to argue that Coleridge's desire for such supernatural language is rooted in his attempts to draw readers out of that lethargic human condition the poet perceives as fueling the violence of the French Revolution. That is, I interpret "The Ancient Mariner" as an allegorical instructive that tries to guide its audiences' imaginative faculties toward the embrace of a supernatural language Coleridge believes can instate peaceful revolution. Its failure to do so will enlighten as to the need for language to exist within and in line with nature, rather than beyond and against it.

Acknowledgments

I give my deepest gratitude to Professor Nersessian, without whose guidance my ideas would have never taken shape. From your trust that behind my scattered outlines there was some kind of hidden coherence—and in helping me find such cohesion—to The Calamity Form's linchpin role in revealing to me "how to get from here to there," your tremendous contribution to the development of this project cannot be overstated. And I do not forget that you taught me to ABC (to Always Be Closing); the length of this thesis suggests I'm not very good at it yet, but I have hope I'll get there eventually. Thank you, Professian. I could not have asked for a better mentor.

No less thankful am I to the friends and family who have supported me in my writing. I thank my parents, for showing me what it means to really work and for instilling within me a foundation of diligence without which this paper would not exist. I thank (and apologize to) my friends, girlfriend, and siblings for listening to my spontaneous ramblings on Coleridge at every "uncertain hour." Though I've spent the last few days in what feels like hermitude, I have kept you all in mind and have immense appreciation for the encouragement you have given me.

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[1] For the titles of sections 2, 3, 5 and 6, I take inspiration from a number of Iron Maiden songs: "Seventh Son of a Seventh Son," "Hell on Earth," "Sign of the Cross," and "Empire of the Clouds." To the band I also owe my introduction into the world of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

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"It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over a sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only as on the wrinkled sand and which paves it."

Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry"

"Such fury I had not expected, and as I grew aware of an actual slipping of my form toward the abyss I was beset by a thousand new terrors of apprehension and imagination."

H.P. Lovecraft, "The Nameless City"

"We must go now, we must take our chance with fate

We must go now, for a politician, he can't be late."

Iron Maiden, "Empire of the Clouds"

I. Introduction

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" seems almost a pariah as the penultimate poem of the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Within a book whose preface promises poetry concerning "incidents and situations from common life" and the relation of such incidents "in a selection of language really used by men," we encounter a poem that seems anything but.[2] Seems but not altogether is. For though Coleridge's tale of vengeful spirits, undead sailors, and raptured souls enthralls us, we cannot forget that "The Ancient Mariner" is composed not only of this fantastic narrative but also, crucially, its communication. The poem essentially captures the experience of listening to a supernatural tale—an incident we must concede is very much true to "common life." And yet there remains a blemish in Coleridge's poetry that costs his name its presence on the title of the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, that incited Wordsworth's relegation of "The Ancient Mariner" to the near-end of the book, and that kept Coleridge laboring upon the poem even after death.[3]

"The Ancient Mariner" is indeed estranged, but this is little the fault of its content or of a reader's tendency to equate its supernatural themes with a wholesale separation from the common human experience of having such strange stories be told to us. On the contrary, I take the position that the Mariner's tale is an allegory for one of the most relevant and "common" feelings confronting Coleridge and Wordsworth's audiences: the need to temper revolutionary fervor in the face of that incredible violence that characterized the French Revolution.[4]

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[2] William Wordsworth, "Preface," in *Lyrical Ballads*, *1802*, ed. Fiona J. Stafford (OUP Oxford, 2013), 96-97.

[3] The final 1834 edition of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was published posthumously.

[4] The novelty of this claim lies in its contention that "The Ancient Mariner" is a deliberate allegory of the violence of the French Revolution. Though much scholarship analyzes the poem alongside Coleridge's commentary on the Revolution, little ventures so far as to claim that "The Ancient Mariner" is consciously about it. As an example is Robert M. Maniquis' stance that "*The Ancient Mariner* is no simple allegory of revolutionary violence" (390). Indeed it is not simple—but I hold that the poem is allegorical nonetheless. Further elaboration follows in Sec. III.

But even under this lens, the poem will seem to us a poor fit for *Lyrical Ballads*. The form of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" reveals why this is so—because where it fails to connect with its listeners is in its composition with language not "really used by men." Closer attention to the Preface of *Lyrical Ballads* suggests this is Wordsworth's argument more than it is mine. For example: when he speaks of "deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse" and their "degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation,"[5] Wordsworth may as well be citing from the lines of "The Ancient Mariner" that describe the Mariner's vessel "as idle as a painted ship" and the mariner himself as surrounded in water but having "nor any drop to drink."[6] In a subtle weaponization of Coleridge's verse against itself, Wordsworth criticizes first how aggrandized poetry, much like Coleridge's painted ship, neither captures nor imparts real activity unto the world; and second, our insatiable desire for this extraordinary yet impotent verse to slake the same thirst that the "real language of men" can. It is Wordsworth's argument that amid revolution, his audiences have grown desirous of poetic forms as excessive as their moment and, further, that pieces like "The Ancient Mariner" detrimentally feed this desire.

Wordsworth becomes a little less subtle in his criticism of the poem when he implies it violates the single restriction that poets should hold themselves to: "that of the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, *a mariner*, an astronomer or a natural philosopher, but as a Man."[7] Speaking not only in extravagant verse but also doing so chiefly through the medium of the Mariner, the form of Coleridge's "Rime" indeed stands in opposition to Wordsworth's mission of cataloging poetry written in the real language of humans.

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[5] Wordsworth, 1802 "Preface," 100.

[6] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 1834 edition (SeaWolf Press, 2023), ll. 117-8, 122.

[7] Wordsworth, 1802 "Preface," 105. Italicization of "a mariner" my own.

As of yet, however, neither Wordsworth nor I have identified the specific characteristics that condemn the form of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as an extravagant and outrageous stimulant that betrays the tranquility of common language.[8] Is the poem not written in the kind of ballad form Wordsworth seeks? I answer no. Though, yes, much of "The Ancient Mariner" is written in ABCB stanzas alternating between iambic trimeters and tetrameters, its adherence to this schema is wildly inconsistent—even within the final 1834 edition I will be working with. With over a quarter of its stanzas straying from the typical 4-line form and a little more than a fifth of its lines breaking the hexasyllabic-octosyllabic alterations of the meter, we can hardly call the ballad's form stable.[9] But if it may seem unreasonable to expect a poem as massive as "The Rime" to maintain perfect adherence to the form it sets out for and, moreover, to posit the deviations from this form as the basis for its failure, let us keep in mind that these are no small slip-ups. That 38 of its 143 stanzas break the ballad's form is no oversight.

For Wordsworth, who insists that "the distinction of metre is regular and uniform, and not like that which is produced by what is usually called poetic diction, arbitrary, and subject to infinite caprices upon which no calculation whatever can be made," such a lack of uniformity in the form of "Rime" must have been a fatal flaw—because when we do not "willingly submit" to the particular laws of meter, we lose the guarantee that "no interference is made" by the poet's passion.[10] That is, where there is no meter to regulate the feeling of poetic language, there is dominion by those "gross and violent stimulants" that alienate us from real language.[11]

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[8] The 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* contains a note in which Wordsworth acknowledges that, despite the formal defects of "Rime," he saw in it "a value which is not often possessed by better Poems" (289). The omission of this note in the 1802 edition lends further credence to speculation that Wordsworth gained distaste for the poem's form.

[9] 38 of 143 stanzas and (depending on how we count) about 130 of 625 lines break the 1834 poem's typical form.

[10] Wordsworth, 1802 "Preface," 108.

[11] Wordsworth, 1802 "Preface," 99.

But we have no need or want for such stimulation, says Wordsworth. For the true poet acquires "a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement."[12] Wordsworth's poet needs no superfluity in form or content to express that which already exists in the "structure of his own mind." On the contrary, the true poet "considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge [...]."[13] This view—that all human faculties of intuition reside within our capacity to perceive and communicate the "infinite complexity of pain and pleasure" of everyday life—Coleridge plainly rejects in his assessments of German philosopher Jacob Boehme.

In an endeavor to make sense of the poem's erratic form, this thesis will examine how Coleridge's resistance to Boehme manifests in the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" with three objectives. The first is to demonstrate that Coleridge's rejection of Boehme reflects a concretization of the poet's view of language as absolutely supernatural. Second, I propose that this removal of language from within the realm of nature catalyzes the disjunctions between form and content that render its verse so unregulated. The final and principal aim of the paper will be to argue that Coleridge's desire for supernatural language is rooted in his attempts to draw his audiences out of that lethargic human condition the poet perceives as fueling the violence of the French Revolution. Not only will we see the failure of Coleridge's experiment, but also its counterintuitive inauguration of a misconception that the only way for poetry to exist in form-content continuity is if its language is alienated from nature.

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[12] Wordsworth, 1802 "Preface," 104.

[13] Wordsworth, 1802 "Preface," 106.

2. The Seven Sons: "Introducing Boehme's "Seven Forms of Spirit"

First, the groundwork. Our first task is to identify the conceptualizations of nature within which "The Ancient Mariner" and its language operate. Frank Lentricchia provides an excellent basis upon which to construct this survey within his consideration of Coleridge's proposal that "natural philosophy places the sole reality of things in an absolute which is at once *causa sui et effectus*…in the absolute identity of subject and object, which it calls nature."[14] Lentricchia glosses that "nature, thus conceived […] is the interdependence and interpenetration of self and external reality."[15] This definition of nature—as the definitive reality found at the intermingling of the self and the external—is the one within which this paper will operate.

Also facilitating an understanding of Coleridge's definition of poetic language, Lentricchia demonstrates that modern characterizations of poems are incompatible with the definition of nature posited above and that Coleridge thus adhered to an alternative conceptualization of language as it relates to poetry:

> In modern contextual theory, a poem is characterized as a self-existing and self-sufficient system of language whose form and content are reciprocally caused, [...]. If a poem is to exist in this way, then the poetic imagination can not function interdependently with nature, or more grandly, with reality. To put it positively: if a form-content split is to be avoided, then the imagination must be grounded in language itself. Meaning (or content) will not thus be found in the "objective" world, or in the poet's mind and emotions, or in a confluence of the two as romanticism would have it, but wholly within the peculiar context of language which is simultaneously the poem's form and meaning.[16]

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[14] Frank Lentricchia, "Four Types of Nineteenth-Century Poetic,"*Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 26, no. 3 (1968): 353, https://doi.org/10.2307/429120.

[15] Lentricchia, "Four Types of Nineteenth-Century Poetic," 353.

[16] Lentricchia, "Four Types of Nineteenth-Century Poetic," 354.

Here, Lentricchia explains that for any poem to possess a mutually generative relationship between its form and content, it must necessarily exist within the exclusive realm of language. However, if it is to exist within this "opaque" black-windowed domain that Lentricchia deems language, the poem is unable to act or be acted upon its environment. The form-content continuous poem is subsequently non-participatory in any nature which we wish to define as "found at the intersection and intermingling of the self and the external."

Recalling the argument with which this paper opens, we find the seeds for the opposite view. Wordsworth insists that a poem's unmooring from form is contrary to its capacity to capture "man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other"—that, in other words, form-content continuity is a facilitator of poetic participation in nature, not a preclusion. To what may we attribute these incongruent understandings of how form-content continuity determines poetic relation to the material? I will answer that they are born from Coleridge's displacement of language outside of nature. For in locating language outside of the material world, Coleridge disallows its products from mutually generative participation in nature.

Toward an understanding of what I mean when I say Coleridge displaces language, let us consider Anya Taylor's assessment of how the poet perceived the relation between his writing and the external: "In accordance with magical theory Coleridge believes that he dominates nature through language."[17] Though not an explicit removal of language from the material world, Coleridge's perception of language as a tool for command already puts it in questionable relation to nature; situating the two in a hierarchical relation of domination and subordination, the poet implies there indeed exists a separation between language and nature.

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[17] Anya Taylor, "Magic in Coleridge's Poetry," *Wordsworth Circle* 3, no. 2 (1972): 78, https://doi.org/10.2307/24039344.

Evaluating Coleridge's rationale for deeming language the dominator of nature only confirms these implications. As Taylor relates, Coleridge held that "the imagination commands nature because it comes originally from somewhere outside or above it."[18] Thus, she continues, "the peculiar importance of language for the well-being of the world explains in part the urgency of the spell-like verse forms that Coleridge cultivates. Because words have a mission to inform and organize, they must use every resource available […] to separate them from everyday conversational speech."[19] Language, in other words, commands nature because—like magic—it has a "peculiar" power to organize the entropic nature from which language hails outside of.

However, this Coleridgean decree that human access to the supernatural phenomenon of language grants us magical control over an incipiently inert nature runs in direct contradiction to the very doctrines of magic and mysticism he asserts his words participate within. Taylor elaborates upon this point in her explanation that by "believing that 'in our life alone does Nature live,' Coleridge betrays the influence of such magicians as Paracelsus who proclaimed that the 'magi are given power over the energies and faculties of nature....The magician is so created that through him the miracles of nature are made visible and given form.'"[20] This is to say that Coleridge's belief that his "strange power of speech" derives from a force outside of and superior to nature fundamentally misconstrues the magic properties he ascribes to language. If we wish to properly assert the poet as a mage and language their spell-book, such power of language—according to Coleridge's inspirators—must be a direct derivative from "the energies and faculties of nature" and must also give form to the already existing "miracles of nature" rather than try to create and domineer these miracles.

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[18] Taylor, "Magic in Coleridge's Poetry," 80.

[19] Taylor, "Magic in Coleridge's Poetry," 82.

[20] Taylor, "Magic in Coleridge's Poetry," 77.

Coleridge's deviation from such principles of magic and mysticism, I argue, becomes the basis upon which he erroneously proposes language originates outside of nature and thereby also complicates attempts to evaluate form-content continuous poetry as participating within an interpenetrating nature. In resistance to this premise that form-content union exists solely within the nature-alienated and "peculiar context of language," this thesis thus proposes the understanding of language as a *derivative* of nature and, as such, a phenomenon within which form and content can be unified and simultaneously reconciled with our definition of nature. Returning to the practices of those betrayed mages who held that their powers were derived from nature, *for* nature, may yet provide the opening we need to reconcile form-content union with a nature that requires a mutually generative relationship with all that seeks to be its constituent—for surely all that derives from nature has the potential to not only be acted on but also act upon its progenitor. As one of such mages, we now turn to Jacob Boehme.

Peter Cheyne writes of the German philosopher's relation to Coleridge that "the writings of Jakob Böhme [...] charged Coleridge's thought with a sense of the divine within the murky."[21] In just these introductory remarks, readers already intimate that Boehme's concern for finding a synthesis "of the divine within the murky" is misaligned with proposals that language cannot be reconciled with nature. Even if we consider language supernatural or *peculiar*,[22] systems that would alienate it from nature on the sole basis of this peculiarity are incongruent with Boehme. Even Coleridge acknowledges this point, Cheyne finds: "Coleridge defends this Behmenist sense of the glorious in the murkiest depths—as in his description of the Mariner's renewing vision of the slimy water-snakes, which 'coiled and swam; and every track | Was a flash of golden fire'".[23]

[21] Peter Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 126.

[22] Both Lentricchia and Taylor make interesting reference to language as "pecuilar."

[23] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 126.

Where Coleridge departs from Boehme, however, is in his belief that a reciprocal dynamic is not also possible, that Boehme errs in "not contemplating as transcendent the source of the divine principles and qualities encountered in the immanent."[24] Put differently, Coleridge holds that the divine may be present in the murk, but murk must not be present in the transcendent divine. This lack of reciprocity reflects the major problem within the content-form knot we have been trying to untangle. For in the same manner that Coleridge here insists on a one-way relation between the transcendent divine and the profane depths, we've been snared by the Coleridgean decree that a poem crafted exclusively within the supernatural realm of language should command nature, but that nature itself cannot reach the poem and is therefore not interpenetrative with it. Where Coleridge's theory interferes the most I reveal in the following exploration of Boehme's "Seven Forms of Spirit" schema and its hybridization by Coleridge.

Beginning with Boehme's divine cosmogony, it consists of "seven polar energies [...] with three energies above, three below, and the flash of the 'Fire-World' burning at the middle."[25]



Fig. 1 — Boehme's "The Seven Forms of Spirits" schema (Cheyne 147)

[24] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 127.

[25] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 129.

In combining the interpenetrative characteristics of this cosmological model with the influence of contemplative theologian St. Richard of Victor, Cheyne continues, Coleridge produces his own "Order of Mental Powers" diagram that rectifies the flaws he found in the Behmenist model:

> Coleridge superimposes on Böhme's bipolar, chiastic model the Victorine unipolar, linear schema to add an unequivocal hierarchy that corrects what the English poet-philosopher saw as the Lusatian mystic's two main errors. To wit, he judged that Böhme veered too close to pantheism, and that he accorded too much dignity to the translucent contemplation of the mixed and the immanent to the detriment of the transparent contemplation of the pure and transcendent. With his hybrid schema, Coleridge acknowledges the crucial role of the Behmenist chiasmus, yet pushes on to emphasize, with the Victorines (and the Platonists) that purity of noetic intuition is the highest human mental quality, allowing the ideas to ordain (order, organize, and renew) the various mental functions.[26]

Thus, Coleridge hybridizes the Behmenist schema such that he is able to usurp the German mystic's blending of the immanent and transcendent in favor of a hierarchical model that champions the "unmixed priority that Christian theology conventionally accords to the absolutely transcendent" and thereby sidestep the pantheistic features he perceived as tainting Boehme's original schema.[27] The upshot is the bestowal upon ideas the power to "order, organize and renew" mental functions—an ability that is strikingly resonant with the duty "to inform and organize" that Taylor lays upon words and language more generally.[28] What we lose, however, is the ability of the "mixed and immanent" to act upon such divine and transcendent ideas.

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[26] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 129.

[27] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 129.

[28] Taylor, "Magic in Coleridge's Poetry," 82.

With this, it becomes clear that to assert language as interpenetrative with nature, we must resist Coleridge's hierarchical model and its postulation of ideas—and by extension, language—as transcendent, domineering forces. As the alternative, I propose restoring Boehme's schema and its view of nature as the "subsumptive power" within which we may view the "interchanging, transposing dynamic of [his] seven cosmogonic spirits as a non-hierarchical nexus."[29] Such will be the model against which I will evaluate the form of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." It is through the Behmenist lens that the poem's instability will become an example of the necessity of form-content continuity. In particular, I will explore "The Ancient Mariner" from the vantage of the three larger realms within which Boehme places his seven forms of spirit—The Dark World, The Fire World, and the Light World—and divide "Rime's" parts among each of these domains such that Parts I-III correspond to the Dark World, Parts III-V to the Fire World, and Parts V-VII to the Light World.

In justification of the section groupings, I present the paper's first analysis of "Rime's" structure as encapsulated within a series of graphs tracking irregularities in the poem's rhyme, stanza length, and syllabic alternation across its seven sections:

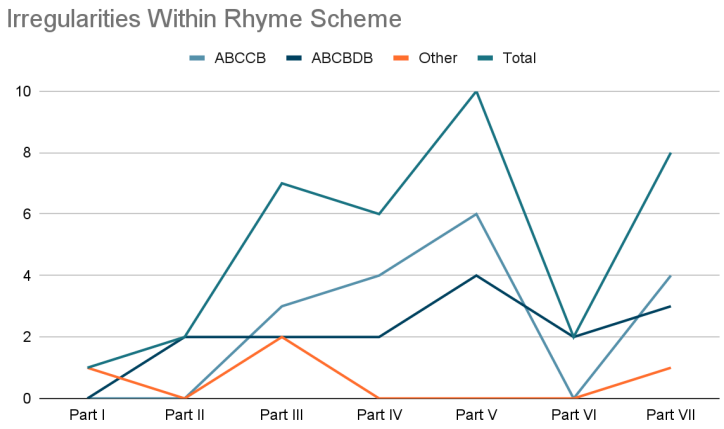


Fig. 2 — Graph representation of irregularities within the rhyme scheme of "The Ancient Mariner"

[29] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 158, 151.

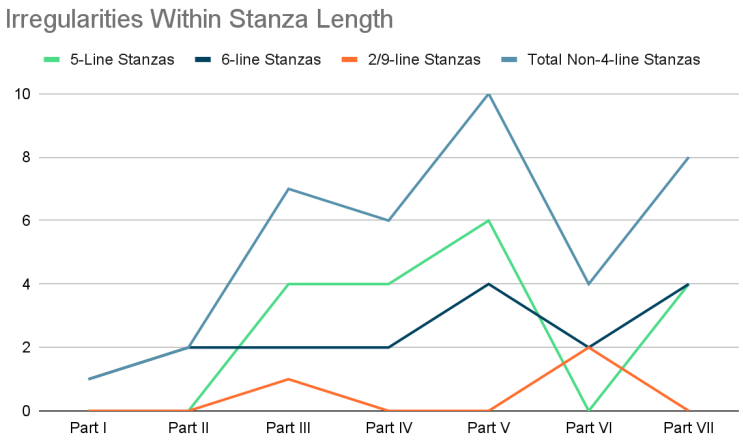


Fig. 3 — Graph representation of irregularities within the length of stanzas in "The Ancient Mariner"

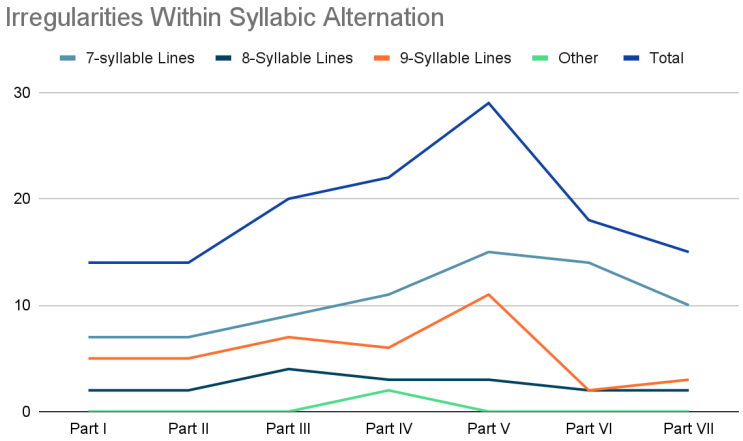


Fig. 4 — Graph representation of irregularities within syllabic alternation in "The Ancient Mariner"[30]

The first thing to note here is that the most prominent deviations from the poem's typical form occur within Parts III and V. Typical form, as dictated by its persistent presence within "Rime," constitutes 4-line ABCB stanzas wherein the first/third lines are written in iambic tetrameter and the second/fourth lines are written in iambic trimeter. General trends in all three of the above graphs indicate that Parts III and V are points at which digressions from this standard form spike. Such increases in entropy within the poetic structure, I argue, represent transitory stages within which readers will find the greatest progressions, both narrative and ideological.

[30] These and all future analyses are based upon the 1834 edition of "The Ancient Mariner."

Under the Behmenist lens I will apply to the poem, however, it will be crucial not to view these progressions as necessarily hierarchical or existing separately. We will instead treat them as Boehme treats his spirits: "like two creatures which in great Love play together, embracing struggling and wrestling with the other; now the one is above, by and by the other, and when one has overcome, it yields or gives over, and lets the *other* rise up again."[31] That is, none of our three domains is devoid of interaction with the others, nor is any one fixed to the post of domination—this a position they assume in turn and will continually do so.

As for the trajectory that each of the parts will follow, the exploration of Parts I-III, superimposed as Boehme's "Dark World," will argue that the mariner's violence, when examined within the context of Coleridge's views on the French Revolution, becomes a warning that unmeditated revolutionary action stagnates the construction of the very reform it seeks to create. Analysis of Parts III-V, superimposed as the "Fire World," generates a Coleridgean pentad to propose that the poet regarded language as the dissolving agent of such stagnation and, specifically, that Coleridge's solution to reform is predicated on the application of that divine and supernatural language which he holds only poets have access to. Parts V-VII, superimposed as the "Light World," will focus exclusively on the poem to try and measure the extent to which Coleridge's revolutionary solution succeeds within the poetic setting he espouses it. Finally, the last section of the thesis will develop an explanation for why Coleridge seeks out a supernatural language as the remedy to revolution to begin with—ultimately also revealing how such a move counterintuitively jeopardizes the effectual power of Coleridge's poetry.[32]

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[31] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 151.

[32] Beneath the logic of the thesis' progression lies the considerable influence of Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology*. Especially formative was McGann's contention that—because Romantic poems "tend to develop different sorts of artistic means with which to occlude and disguise their own involvement in a certain nexus of historical relations"—the "critic of Romantic poetry must make a determined effort to elucidate the subject matter of such poems *historically*: to define the specific ways in which certain stylistic forms intersect and join with certain factual and cognitive points of reference" (82). It is due to this insight that the thesis develops its historicist approach.

3. Circle of Hell on Earth: A Proposal for Chronic Revolution in Parts I-III

The suggestion that revolutionist commentary resides within "Rime" may initially seem dubious to readers, considering that the poem appears generally disconnected from the radical events that preceded its publication in 1798—particularly those of the French Revolution. Peter Kitson expresses a similar concern: that because Coleridge described his poem as "a work of such pure imagination,'" it might "seem perverse to try to relate the poem to a historical event such as the French Revolution."[33] And yet, it is difficult to overlook the intensity with which Coleridge advocated for Revolutionary France in the years leading up to his composition of "Rime." Taking stock of such radicalism, I thus adopt Kitson's thinking that "it is not inappropriate to enquire of the poem if any of these contemporary concerns resurface from their concealed depths[...]."[34] More than that though, I propose that Coleridge's desire to capture "pure imagination" is in itself a direct response to his revolutionary moment—that the imagination of "The Ancient Mariner" is intended as a corrective to revolutionary violence.

Toward this inquiry, we first pinpoint the poet's overarching concerns regarding the French Revolution. Nicholas Roe's "Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years" serves such purposes wonderfully. We may begin, for example, with Roe's summation that "equally consistent" with Coleridge's opposition to Britain's wars against France "was his belief that war and violent revolution could only be prevented by 'cultivating benevolent affections' associated with philanthropy and Unitarianism."[35] Here, readers already gather that while Coleridge was indeed supportive of France's cause, religious doctrine compelled him to push back against the violent means through which the French were propelling their movement.

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[33] Peter Kitson, "Coleridge, the French Revolution and the Ancient Mariner: A Reassessment," *The Coleridge Bulletin*, no. 7 (1996): 30, https://www.friendsofcoleridge.com/MembersOnly/kitsonFrenchRev.html.

[34] Kitson, "Coleridge, the French Revolution and the Ancient Mariner," 30.

[35] Nicholas Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The Radical Years* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 123.

Also significant is that Coleridge's reasoning for adopting this non-violent path toward reformation was secondarily rooted in doubt that "the self-perpetuating cycle of war, economic decline, crime, and persecution"[36] possessed any substantial ability to usher forth the sociopolitical transformation that revolutionaries were hoping for. Roe utilizes the following excerpt from Coleridge's *"*On the Present War*"* lecture to explain this self-generating cycle of violence: "War ruins our Manufactures; the ruin of our Manufactures throws Thou sands out of employ; men cannot starve: they must either pick their country men's Pockets—or cut the throats of their fellow-creatures."[37] Painting the development of the French Revolution as the embodiment of such cyclical engagements, Roe further notes that "Coleridge cited the 'Example of France' as a warning to British reformists, declaring that 'French Freedom is the Beacon, that while it guides us to Equality should show us the Dangers, that throng the road.'"[38] Even still though, Roe goes on to say, "Coleridge takes the argument full circle by identifying Pitt, not Robespierre, as responsible for the Terror in France":[39]

> It was a truth easily discovered, a truth on which our Minister has proceeded, that valour and victory would not be the determiners of this War. They would prove finally successful whose resources enabled them to hold out the longest. The commerce of France was annihilated...Immense armies were to be supported...Alas! Freedom weeps! The Guillotine became the Financier General.—That dreadful pilot, Robespierre, perceived that it would at once furnish wind to the sails and free the vessel from those who were inclined to mutiny.[40]

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[36] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 125.

[37] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 125.

[38] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 187. Roe cites from Coleridge's *Moral and Political Lecture.*

[39] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 206.William Pitt: The Britsh Prime Minister during the French Revolutionary Wars. Maximilien Robespierre: one of the most influential leaders of the French Revolution.

[40] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 206. Roe cites from Coleridge's "On the Present War" lecture.

In other words, Coleridge argues that William Pitt's hand in decimating the economy of France created such a dire situation for the French that they saw no other alternative than to escalate to the degree of violence that characterized the Terror. Roe corroborates this argument with the detail that since the guillotine machinery used throughout the Terror was only introduced in response to outside threats, "Coleridge had sound economic grounds for his claim that, by maintaining a war of attrition against France, Pitt had in fact supplied the 'occasion and the motive' for the Terror" and consequently "provoked Robespierre to violence."[41]

With this, we now have a sufficient grasp of Coleridge's stances regarding the French Revolution. Though certainly supportive of the revolutionary cause, he could not wholly align with the violent and circular methods of his European neighbors. But even as Coleridge condemned the carnage of the Terror, he held that the guillotine's blood fell primarily on the hands of the British officials who provoked France to such radical violence. Let us now evaluate how Coleridge believed we could learn of bloodless revolution through this "French Example."

Citing from Coleridge's *A Moral and Political Lecture*, Kitson identifies what seems to be one of the most significant lessons that the poet-philosopher derives from the revolution in France. There, Coleridge writes that "the annals of the French Revolution have recorded in Letters of Blood, that the Knowledge of the Few, when it is confined to a small minority, points out the possessors as the Victims, rather than the Illuminators of the multitude."[42] This is to say that Coleridge identifies the lack of enlightened knowledge among the "multitude" as the underlying culprit responsible for violent revolution and as a perpetrating force of the self-realizing cycle of war he asserts reformists must break from if they wish for true progress.

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[41] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 207.

[42] Kitson, "Coleridge, the French Revolution and the Ancient Mariner: A Reassessment," 35.

Kitson sums up the core of this revised political philosophy by glossing that "Coleridge is thus arguing that some kind of prior enlightenment or moral revolution, must precede political change."[43] Yet more revelatory than this conclusion, however, is Kitson's ultimate proposal that the Coleridgean "notion that 'general illumination should precede Revolution' [...] has important implications for parts of the action of *The Ancient Mariner.*"[44] I will again adopt Kitson's argument as I launch my analyses of Parts I-III of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

In particular, I propose that Coleridge's intellectual participation in the French Revolution is reflected within two major arcs of the first three parts of "Rime." First, I contend that the Mariner's characterization in Parts I-III bears a striking resemblance to Coleridge's description of the French Revolutionary figure Robespierre. From the parallels established therein, I will move toward an evaluation of the Sun's movement with the ultimate aim of interpreting the star's cyclical motions throughout the initial three parts of "Rime" as representing Mariner-Robespierre's ensnarement in the Coleridgean cycle of war described above.

Beginning then with the parallels between Robespierre and the Mariner, Coleridge's depiction of the revolutionary in his 1795 *Moral and Political Lecture* is particularly remarkable:

> Robespierre . .. possessed a glowing ardor that still remembered the *end*, and a cool ferocity that never either overlooked, or scrupled, the *means*. What that end was, is not known: that it was a wicked one, has by no means been proved. I rather think, that the distant prospect, to which he was traveling, appeared to him grand and beautiful; but that he fixed his eye on it with such intense eagerness as to neglect the foulness of the road.[45]

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[43] Kitson, "Coleridge, the French Revolution and the Ancient Mariner: A Reassessment," 35.

[44] Kitson, "Coleridge, the French Revolution and the Ancient Mariner: A Reassessment," 36.

[45] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 207.

Here, the first detail to note is the image of Robespierre as possessing a "glowing ardor" and eager eye—for Coleridge too paints the Mariner as "bright-eyed" and singled out by "his glittering eye."[46] In both contexts, the intensity in the eyes of these men seems indicative of their resolute will; in much the same manner that Robespierre's "fixed" eye marks his determination to reach his "distant prospect," the Mariner's eye operates as both an embodiment and executor of his desire to hold the Wedding Guest and teach him his tale.

Yet more intriguing is that Coleridge seems devoid of knowledge regarding either of the figure's motives for travel. Just as Coleridge acknowledges that though Robespierre "remembered the end, [...] [w]hat that end was is not known," readers of "Rime" know that the poem never explicitly reveals why the Mariner participated in his sea journey. The closest semblance to the revelation of any such details is within the Mariner's early recollection that

> The ship was cheer'd, the harbor clear'd,
> Merrily did we drop
> Below the kirk, below the hill,
> Below the light-house top.[47]

Though even these lines give minimal description as to the circumstance of the Mariner's departure, what we *can* gather is that his voyage was, like Robespierre's journey to an unknown yet "beautiful" destination, meant to be characterized by "cheer." We may also note the lack of situational awareness that characterizes both the Mariner and Robespierre's exodus. Interpreting the Mariner's fall below the "kirk," "hill," and "lighthouse top" as a tripartite separation from church, earth, and light, his departure seems now more like a descent into hellish darkness he nevertheless "merrily" and quite obliviously enters. Similarly, Coleridge's account that

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[46] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 3, 13.

[47] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 21-24.

Robespierre was so intently focused on his end "as to neglect the foulness of the road" implies that the revolutionary held so staunchly to an idealistic oblivion that he became blinded to the pitfalls and dangers of his journey.

Recalling Coleridge's prescription for the violent ills of revolution, I contend that his depictions of the Mariner and Robespierre as obliviously led into a dark hellscape by their unrelenting wills is what the poet surmises as the consequence of engaging in revolution without seeking "prior enlightenment or moral revolution"—that Mariner and Robespierre alike participate in Coleridge's self-perpetuating cycle of war.[48] Having established the parallels of the two figures and situated them within this circle of violence, let us evaluate whether the Sun cycles of Parts I-III may further illuminate Coleridgean ideals of reform.

Right from its first appearance in stanza seven, Coleridge shows a marked investment in accentuating the Sun as an object of motion:

> The Sun came up upon the left,
> Out of the sea came he!
> And he shone bright, and on the right
> Went down into the sea."[49]

Of particular note here is Coleridge's deployment of the sea as a recurring point from which the sun is expected to rise and fall according to its cycle. By anchoring the sun to sea in this manner, Coleridge effectively establishes the star's motion as predictable and safe—for in knowing that the Sun has its systematic origin and destination within the waters he sails upon, the Mariner may look to the Sun as a signal of stability and as reassurance that his journey is protected.

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[48] Kitson, "Coleridge, the French Revolution and the Ancient Mariner: A Reassessment," 35.

[49] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 25-28.

Considering also the alternations between tetrameter and trimeter and between unrhymed and rhymed lines in this stanza, these features reinforce the sense of predictable safeness that the Sun generates in that they give the stanza a dynamic yet still formularized cadence not difficult to adapt. Just as the reader learns to anticipate a rhyme after the unlined rhyme, we can imagine that the Mariner accepted the absence of light in knowing anticipation of the dawn to follow.

And yet, this sense of guiding stability that the Sun bestows upon the Mariner falters as the star makes its second appearance. Immediately after revealing the Mariner's murder of the albatross, Coleridge opens Part II of the poem with an account that

> The Sun now rose upon the right:
> Out of the sea came he,
> Still hid in mist, and on the left
> Went down into the sea.[50]

Noting the reversal of the sun's rise and setting,[51] that this significant alteration to the sun's cycle follows on the heels of the Albatross's death implies that the Mariner's violence unto the bird was so deeply contrary to nature that his guiding compass, the Sun itself, has been flipped on its head. Though the sun's cycle persists, the stability of its path is lost and the bright shine of the star becomes "hid in mist." Similarly, though the stanza's structural features remain the same, their application unto a description of subversion rather than constancy makes them unreliable indicators of the poem's action. Even as the stanza captures a reversal of nature, that its form does not reflect such reversal suggests structure's inability to match meaning. The murder of the albatross, in other words, disrupts the continuity of language and form within "Rime" itself.

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[50] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 83-86.

[51] Whereas in lines 25-28, the sun rises from left to right, it here now rises from right to left.

Nevertheless, the implications born from the change of the Sun's cycle go largely unacknowledged by the Mariner. On the contrary, the Sun's next rising operates, from the perspective of the sailor, as a divine reassurance that his journey remains blessed by the star. Because just as his crewmates were beginning to condemn the Mariner's murder,

> Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
> The glorious Sun uprist:
> Then all averr'd, [he] had kill'd the bird
> That brought the fog and mist.
> Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
> That bring fog and mist.[52]

Here, the Sun functions as a God-like emblem whose manifestation before the seamen indicates to them that the slaying of the albatross was not only sanctioned by heaven, but perhaps even *urged* by divine providence—for had they not killed the bird who "brought the fog and mist,", the glorious light of "God's own head" would have remained in shrouded and misty obscurity. The Sun thus becomes a simultaneous reassurance and representation of the Mariner's belief that his violent journey is a justified and necessary design within a larger unknown schema.

However, this appearance that the Mariner's confidence in the motion of the Sun remains unshaken is betrayed by the structure of the stanza in which such confidence is asserted. Particularly, the two extraneous lines in stanza 24, "Twas right, said they, such birds to slay, / That bring fog and mist," are a mere paraphrasing of the two preceding lines and consequently read as if the Mariner is mulling over the justification he has received in an attempt to convince himself of its validity. This repetition, paired with the identical rhyme of "mist" within lines 100

[52] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 97-102. Stanza 24.

and 102, generates a redundant cycle within the stanza—as if the Mariner's faith in the patterns of the Sun has become an insufficient source of stability and he now must replicate the cyclical nature of the star within his very speech if he wishes to find greater absolution from his murder of the albatross. Again we find that the Mariner's crimes against nature are so profoundly felt that the poem itself suffers from dissonance; in the same manner that the sailor betrays the bird now too does the structure of "Rime" betray its language.

What follows this disjuncture is a confirmation that the unease reflected within the structure of the Mariner's speech was accurately intuited. Though the sun does indeed rise, its movement across the sky ceases there, till

> All in a hot and copper sky,
>
> The bloody Sun, at noon,
>
> Right up above the mast did stand,
>
> No bigger than the Moon.[53]

The Mariner's guiding light here grows stagnant as the "bloody Sun" becomes a burning brand whose impression into the heavens desiccates any prior confidence that the celestial circle may have been an emblem of divine vindication. Having now assuredly lost the stability of the Sun, the proceeding stanza again encapsulates the Mariner's attempt to replicate the cyclical nature of the Sun's motion through repetitive speech as he recalls how

> Day after day, day after day,
>
> We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
>
> As idle as a painted ship
>
> Upon a painted ocean.[54]

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[53] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 111-14 Stanza 27.

[54] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 115-18. Stanza 28.

It is especially noteworthy that while stanza 28's second/fourth lines have seven syllables and thus break the poem's conventional alternation between tetrameters and trimeters, the first/third line's octosyllabic stasis suggests a reconstitution of cycles. With faith in the Sun lost, the Mariner failingly tries to adapt his speech such that it no longer reflects the pattern with which he initially sought to emulate the star. I say failingly because this new pattern between octosyllabic and heptasyllabic lines generates a reading in which metrical alternation is much less discernible; rather than mimic the cyclical renewal the Mariner finds absent in the sun, his change in speech instead reflects the stagnation with which his days are becoming blurred.

Five stanzas later, however, even this miserable attempt to find hope of renewing progress is literally "wither'd at the root."[55] Suffering a drought of revolutionary momentum, the sailors now also lose their ability to mediate through language in that they can no longer so little as "speak, no more than if / [they] had been choked with soot."[56] Under the idle circle of the Sun, the mariners become subject to total ensnarement within a chronic cycle of distress.

The castigation against the albatross' murder seems now at its zenith. With speech and Sun both stalled, the Mariner's violent action loses its divine justification as well as the basis in cyclical reassurance that the sailor strove to preserve in speech when it faltered within the Sun. And yet, the mariner fails to realize the stagnating consequences of his barbarity. In an attempt to resume his powers of speech, the mariner exercises violence once again, this time unto himself:

> "I bit my arm, I suck'd the blood,
>
> And cried, A sail! a sail!"[57]

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[55] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 136.

[56] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 137-38.

[57] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 160-61.

Here, the mariner's autovampirism literalizes the spilling of blood as an agent of reinvigoration; in slaking his thirsted throat with his own blood, the mariner employs violence as a method through which his action can again find justification in language. And indeed, this autocannibalism renews hope among the crew, even prompting the heavens to motion until

> The western wave was all a-flame
> The day was well nigh done!
> Almost upon the western wave,
> Rested the broad, bright Sun;
> When that strange shape drove suddenly
> Betwixt us and the Sun.[58]

But, as the final two lines of the stanza intimate, such relief is short-lived. Just before the star can conclude its cycle, the "strange shape" driven between the sailors and the Sun acts such that the star appears "as if through a dungeon grate."[59] The very star from which he seeks justification now imprisoned, the Mariner's blood-born speech is as if to inaugurate a castigation that now fully reveals the circuitous "progress" of his violence. In other words: that the arrest of his star of reassurance succeeds his autocannibalism signals the definite censure of such savage activity.

The structure of stanza 41 facilitates this interpretation of the Mariner's speech. Namely, the addition of the two final lines detailing the confiscation of the Sun within a stanza that would have otherwise adhered to the poem's typical form and triumphantly announced the resumed motion of the star reinforces the notion that the Sun's imprisonment is unnatural—that the mariner's violently-derived language interferes with the arc of nature and that such interferences, again, create ruptures in the continuity of language and form within the very body of "Rime."

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[58] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 171-76. Stanza 41.

[59] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 179.

The ripples of the Mariner's brutal action culminate in the departure of the sun and the appearance of the poem's first and only nine-line stanza. Immediately after the "Sun's rim dips" and "at one stride comes the dark,"[60] there follows a deeply discordant account of fear fittingly captured within the most structurally entropic stanza in the poem:

> We listened and looked sideways up!
> Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
> My life-blood seemed to sip!
> The stars were dim, and thick the night,
> The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;
> From the sails the dew did drip—
> Till clomb above the eastern bar
> The horned Moon, with one bright star
> Within the nether tip.[61]

Noting first the AABCCBDDB scheme, the manner in which the rhyme's continuity is repeatedly broken and reconstituted with new, yet ultimately still aborted couplets is reflective of the Mariner's several attempts to revive his journey's progress under the Sun's revolutionary cycles. Especially now that the light of the sun is gone and the Mariner's hopes are dashed, the rhyme's continuous reconstitution and failure under new terms is reminiscent of the sailor's circuitous inability to sustain a violent journey that itself is circuitous. The meter's erratic switch between tetrameters and trimeters that struggle to conform to the poem's pattern of syllabic alternations further reinforces the sense that the Mariner lacks guidance without the Sun and that his speech, as an extension of verse, suffers from the violations of nature that it itself is born of.

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[60] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 199-200.

[61] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 203-11.

With the natural manifestation of cycles from which the Mariner learned to hope in revolutions now arrested, he can look only toward "The horned Moon, with one bright star within the nether tip"—that is, a fractured and hollowed circle that is now only illuminated by the former glory of the sun's light or by the burning of a smaller and more distant star.

With the primary arc of the Sun now concluded, the proposal that I began this section with, that for the presence of revolution within Parts I-III of "Rime", will find its greatest justification under the revaluation of the poem's sun cycles as an almost paronomastic emblem of the underdeveloped revolutionary hope that Coleridge found fueled figures like Robespierre. Not unlike his Mariner, who looks to the "revolutions" of the sun for misplaced reassurance that his journey is blessed and his violence ordained, Coleridge argues Robespierre mistakenly looked to violent "revolution" as a medium through which he might bring the democratization of France.

A look into Robespierre's "On Political Morality" will reinforce this Coleridgean argument that the Frenchman did indeed find himself justified by revolutionary ardor. Particularly fascinating is Robespierre's insistence that "in order to lay the foundations of democracy," reformists like himself needed to "finish the war of liberty against tyranny and safely cross through the storms of the revolution."[62] Such contest against despotism, Robespierre argued, necessitated a reciprocation of violence which he justified under the logic that "the sword which glitters in the hands of liberty's heroes resembles the one with which tyranny's lackeys are armed."[63] Like the Mariner's crossbow, whose illumination under renewed daylight ostensibly turned it from a cursed implement of death to a hallowed tool of liberation, Robespierre's sword was to be differentiated from that of the despot's upon its placation of the "storms of revolution."

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[62] Maximilien Robespierre, "Robespierre's Speech of 17 Pluviose," in *The Ninth of Thermidor: The Fall of Robespierre*, ed. Richard Bienvenu (Oxford University Press, 1968), 34.

[63] Robespierre, "Robespierre's Speech of 17 Pluviose," 39.

However, neither the Mariner nor Robespierre's weapons proved to be wrought with this revolutionary cast. Robespierre's Terror turns utterly violent, the Mariner's sun stays stuck in the sky, and so the very entities that initially inspired hope in the two figures become representative of their ensnarement in a stagnant cycle.[64] As the Mariner's sun stands as a broken and unmoving circle, so too does Robespierre's movement fall into a violent, chronic revolution. This is the stagnation over which I lay Boehme's "Dark World." And indeed—Parts I-III of "The Ancient Mariner seem very much characterized by those spirits of "harsh-desiring will," "stinging," and "anguish" that reside within Boehme's unlightened domain.[65] So far so good; Coleridge and Boehme agree that the murk alone is not ideal. The poet has not yet betrayed the mystic.[66]

[64] For an alternative reading of the sun's symbolic role within the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," see section four of Robert Penn Warren's "A Poem of Pure Imagination." Though Warren's reading of the sun differs from the one I present, his meticulous attention to the poem's celestial cycles nevertheless informed my decision to choose the sun as this section's primary object of analysis.

[65] These are the three spirits comprising Boehme's "Dark World." See Fig.1 on page 14.

[66] This will be seen as we move forward, but it is nevertheless worth clarifying that the form-content ruptures this section analyzes are not yet born from Coleridge's desire to displace language. Rather—as this section argues—such disagreements between form and content reflect Coleridge's arguments that revolutionary violence is contrary to natural progress and harmony. This is only a stepping stone towards Coleridge's displacement of language, but still a crucial one. The poet has not yet betrayed the mytsic, but we have now the context within which he does.

4. The Mariner's Rime: Considering Speech in Parts III-V via the Coleridgean Pentad

Having made an argument for revolution within "The Ancient Mariner," we will now evaluate a more conspicuous feature of the poem: its theorization of language. Namely, this section will explore how "Rime" engages the Coleridgean argument that poetry can access the divine and so offers a path toward peaceful reform. Roe contextualizes this theory with dual claims that 1) for Coleridge, "the only 'gentle words' that might prevent violent revolution were God's" and 2) the poet was "constructing a bridge from politics to poetry" in his insistence that "lyrical language can offer symbolic approximations" of an otherwise inexplicable grasp of God.[67] Put differently, a synthesis of these points holds that lyrical language, as an approximation of the divine, allows access to those gentle words of God that may prevent violent revolution.

Though the above point creates a strong foundation, a full comprehension of this Coleridgean perspective of language is incomplete without a discussion of the poet's stance on imagination. However, considering the immensity of Coleridge's theories on imagination, I will explore them strictly as they relate to revolution.[68] Toward this end, Coleridge's preface to the "Lecture on the Slave-Trade*"* supplies a remarkably powerful expression of such theories:

> Our Almighty Parent hath therefore given to us Imagination that stimulates to the attainment of real excellence by the contemplation of splendid Possibilities that still revivifies the dying motive within us, and fixing our eye on the glittering Summits that rise one above the other in Alpine endlessness still urges us up the ascent of Being, amusing the ruggedness of the road with the beauty and grandeur of the ever-widening Prospect. Such and so noble are the ends for which this restless faculty was given us—but horrible has been its misapplication.[69]

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[67] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 211, 215.

[68] For an expanded discussion of the interrelation between Coleridgean theories of imagination and poetic language, see *Coleridge's Poetics* by Paul Hamilton.

[69] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 215-16.

Harking back to the image of Robespierre as a sparkle-eyed adventurer, Coleridge here asserts that imaginative power is a god-given gift designed to facilitate our "attainment of real excellence" by first allowing us to conceive of the "splendid possibilities" which we have the potential to but have not yet actualized. Conceived in this frame, the applications of imagination onto a revolutionary effort make solid sense; in its ability to let us perceive what can be and subsequently impel us toward the actualization of such potential, the faculty of imagination would have certainly been a necessary inspiration for figures like Robespierre and their aim to actualize radical, unseen change within an environment whose potential had gone unrealized.

And yet, despite his defenses of revolution explored in the section prior, Coleridge ends this discourse on imagination lamenting that "horrible has been its misapplication." Though, given the subject of the lecture, this is likely more a condemnation of the imaginative abuses that fueled the institution of slavery, Coleridge's sorrow nevertheless rings as if to simultaneously condemn the "misapplications" of revolutionaries like Robespierre. This may be partially because Coleridge *did* indeed see parallels between the dreadful effects of slavery and those of the French Revolution. To elaborate, let us turn to Coleridge's "diagnosis" of slavery as it is summated by Tim Fulford's analysis of "Slavery and superstition in the supernatural poems":

> Slavery produced superstition which in turn produced mental enslavement, perpetuating slavery. In proportion to their own powerlessness, subjugated peoples granted others powers that seemed supernatural. Unscrupulous tyrants took advantage of this tendency to cement their authority: they ensured those they oppressed stayed spellbound by their power. The people of Britain and France, 'slaves by their own compulsion," were mentally as manacled as the West Indian slaves whom Britain's rulers kept in iron chains.[70]

[70] Tim Fulford, "Slavery and Superstition in the Supernatural Poems," in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46.

This is to say that Coleridge thought of slavery as a self-perpetuating cycle within which the subjugated found no other outlet for their powerlessness than to imbue upon others supernatural authority such that they ultimately bestowed upon their very tyrants the ability to keep the oppressed "spellbound by their power." To an extent, we could argue that the previous section's exploration of the Mariner's relationship with the Sun provides an example of such enslavement; powerless against nature, the sailor surrenders himself to the supernatural guidance of the very Sun that ultimately turns out to be the most glaring manifestation of his ensnarement. If the parallels between the Mariner and Robespierre persist, it also follows that the Frenchman created his captivity to revolutionary ideals by giving them an inordinate dominion over his thoughts.

More innovatively, we may also identify a subversion of this power dynamic upon which the formerly captivated Mariner takes the seat of supernatural tyrant. As he arrests the Wedding Guest with a glittering eye and *sustains* this hold by exploiting the supernatural characteristic that the guest attributes to his gaze, the Mariner reenters the Coleridgean cycle of enslavement, this time from the vantage of the captivator rather than the captive. Here, however, is where the parallels between the Mariner and Robespierre cease; any supernatural arc of captivation I have just identified in the Mariner is absent within Robespierre's life.

Does this indicate that the poem also ceases to be about revolution beyond its first three parts? I say no. On the contrary—I hold that beyond Parts I-III is where Coleridge begins to formulate his very solution to revolutionary violence. Beyond the retrospective action within the poem's initial third, the Mariner transcends the life of Robespierre and becomes instead the figure through which Coleridge imagines how those revolutionaries who (like the Mariner) have started on a track of violence might nevertheless correct their trajectory. The Mariner, in other words, becomes an example of Coleridge's corrected revolutionary figure.

In particular—and as we will soon see—Coleridge finds that rectifying Robespierre's violence will necessitate the capacity to tame ardor with poetry. For, as Fulford relates, "[r]esolving reverie into conscious will was the crux of Coleridge's poetic project in 1797–8. If poetic reverie could give readers a share in imagining the world differently, then it could transform them, thus beginning the reformation of the slavish self that Coleridge considered essential if political liberty was to be achieved."[71] In other words, Coleridge's solution to the enslavement which he perceived prior revolutionaries had fallen victim to was none other than lyrical language; only under "poetic reverie" could the full extent of our imaginative powers be utilized toward the "reformation of the slavish self" still ensnared by hasty revolutionary ideals.

However, only a select few possessed the lyrical ability to move the imaginations of the masses toward the true pursuit of political liberty—so the argument finally culminates in Coleridge's dual stances that "the Knowledge of the Few cannot counteract the Ignorance of the Many" and "that general Illumination should precede Revolution."[72] With this, Robespierre's redeemer is now revealed. It is the poet who, like the Mariner, captivates the imaginations of their audience with the glowing light of lyrical language and turns their minds toward the instruction of non-violent revolution.

As elitist as this solution seems, the view of the masses it operates under Coleridge did not hold alone. Especially within politicized art of the era, depictions of "the many" often characterize them as brutish wretches dominated by their ignorance. James Gillray's "Un petit souper a la Parisienne" (1792) is one of the most striking manifestations of such illustrations.

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[71] Fulford, "Slavery and Superstition in the Supernatural Poems," 55.

[72] Peter Kitson, "Political Thinker," in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 162.



Fig. 5 — "Un petit souper a la Parisienne," by James Gillray (1792)

As Roe aptly describes it, the "cartoon of *sans-culottes* feasting on human flesh [...] captured an appropriately horrific scene with the caption 'Here as you see, and as 'tis known, / Frenchmen mere Cannibals are grown.'"[73] This attribution of cannibalism to the French lower classes feels particularly congruent with Coleridge's argument for their ignorance and incapacity for lyrical language; it was as if to suggest that the mouths and minds of *sans-culottes* were far too occupied with feasts of revolutionary carnage to be employed in the service of the lyrical redemption Coleridge insists upon. Here we might also recall the Mariner's autocannibalism and how the slaking of thirst with his own blood allows him only an impotent speech of false hope that itself is gravely misplaced. Indeed, this is no good look for the revolutionary cause.

[73] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 119-20.

How then is language to tame such widespread and slavish adherence to the misplaced imaginations of the revolution? How is poetic reverie to reorient the imaginative powers of the masses? I suggest that the fusion of geometry into language plays a crucial role in the Coleridgean scheme. A brief summation of Basil Montagu's theory of geometry will reveal why:

> If I am to imagine or form an image, by putting things together in my mind, in an arrangement different from that in which I have beheld them, & thus create a whole which I have not seen, out of parts which I have seen; the distinctness of the original conceptions will be equally subservient to this process. By appealing in this manner to his senses, & making him feel the firmness of the ground on which he treads, one might probably instruct a boy...in the elements of Geometry, so as rarely to give him disgust, & frequently great satisfaction.[74]

The resonance this theory has with Coleridge's idea of "Creativeness by Combination" has incredibly profound implications for how we move forward in contemplating why Coleridge champions lyrical language specifically as the redeemer of revolution. Namely, if we allow ourselves to conceive of poetry as an arrangement of different images – or more accurately, words – that synthesizes these forms to "create a whole which [we] have not seen, out of parts which [we] have seen," lyrical language quickly becomes the organizing agent of the untamed and savage imaginative power which Coleridge believes afflicts the minds of the majority: it becomes "the firmness of the ground" upon which we may tread toward peaceful revolution.

With this, I argue that "Rime" is the chief organizer through which Coleridge tries to turn the imaginative power of the many away from slavish, chronic violence and toward meditated reform. Of course, this argument is based partly upon the fact that the poem embodies a synthesis of revolutionary images from which Coleridge may organize his listeners' crude imaginations.

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[74] Roe, *The Radical Years,* 225.

It will primarily unfold, however, from the secondary proposal that Parts III-V embody geometry's organizing principle—that through its construction of a Coleridgean pentad, the heart of the poem reveals a contemplative instruction manual teaching readers how to properly employ language for themselves.

Cheyne prefaces his explanation of the Coleridgean pentad with the context that "Coleridge's metaphysics involves the upward dimension of contemplation or idealization, the downward of actualization, and lateral axis of polarity."[75] These dimensions, he continues, are "modeled by pentadic forms" Coleridge used to

> conceive the three general levels of reality and their interrelations. Reality in this most general sense consists of reality (God, Logos, the ideas, the fundamental powers); actuality (*natura naturans*, the opposed powers or forces that are non-phenomenal yet produce phenomena); and phenomenality (the evolving objects of experience that arise in the synthesis of the opposed powers of actuality).[76]

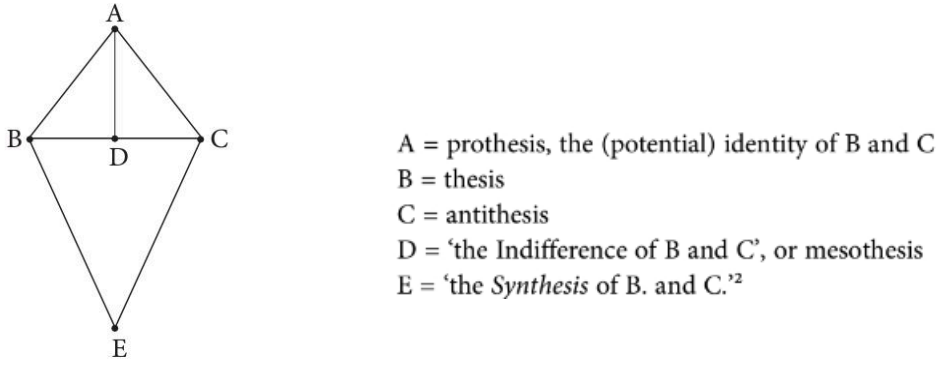


Fig. 6 — The Coleridgean Pentad (Cheyne 267)

[75] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 273.

[76] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 273-74.

Used primarily to think through and organize subjects of philosophy, Cheyne identifies four primary relations that ultimately constitute the rules and constraints for the generation of a pentadic form. They are the following:

> (1) The prothesis must be the most general of the terms, encompassing the others. For example, 'the Real', denoting all that is or is possible, is the most general category [...].
>
> (2) The thesis and antithesis must be codependent opposites, not mutually cancelling contraries. While contraries have an excluded middle, opposites have a middle position.
>
> (3) The 'indifference-point', or'mesothesis', must function as the thesis to the antithesis, and as antithesis to the thesis. [...] For cultural example, [Coleridge] considers the journalistic 'Press' to function as the indifference between the 'State', catering for the physical and economic needs of the 'Nation' (the prothetic idea of the whole), and the 'Church', which serves its spiritual needs.
>
> (4) A thesis–antithesis opposition must be able to produce in synthesis a *tertium aliquid* (a third thing different from the other two), unlike contraries, which exist independently of one another, and, unproductive, the weaker one is simply cancelled out or diminished.[3] His examples include [...] the Crown as the symbolic synthesis of Church and state.[77]

Working within the bounds of these rules, I generate a defense of the above proposal that Parts III-V encapsulate the poem's highest geometric principle of organization by demonstrating that this middle part of the poem acts as the bridge through which the lyrical language of the poet guides the masses away from their ensnarement in revolutionary violence—that it is, in other words, the heart and inception-point of a pentad through which readers may contemplate the role of language in revolution and thereby learn the productive value of their speech. I suggest that the pentad unfolds in the following fashion:

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[77] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 275-276.

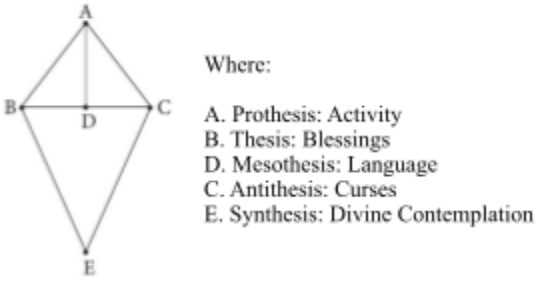


Fig. 7 — A pentadic form for the evaluation of language in "The Ancient Mariner"

Upon revisitation of the previous section with this pentad form now in mind, I propose that the translation of Boehme's "Dark World" unto the revolutionary arc of the first three parts of "Rime" also encapsulates the prothetical term of our pentad: in this realm of chronic revolution, we find the most foundational reality and activity from which all subsequent terms spring.[78] The remainder of this section will demonstrate how Parts III-V of "Rime" mark the movement away from this prothetical activity and toward the terms within the pentad's lateral axis of actualization, wherein the heart of the pentad, language, finds itself flanked by the polar manifestations of curses and blessings. Such explorations will reinforce the contention that "Rime" is a manifestation of Coleridge's attempt to reorganize the masses' imaginative powers toward peaceful reform—a claim that will be further concretized in the argument for the pentad's culmination in the phenomenality of divine speech, which will be made in the section to follow.

At this point, however, further exploration of Parts III-V will reveal that the initial movement away from prothetical activity and toward the actualizing axis of language is characterized by encounters with the antithesis of curses. Immediately after the stanza on which the first section concluded and through which we determined that the Sun's arrest was indicative of a catastrophic revolutionary failure, there follows the Mariner's horrified realization that

[78] Though—as stated in the introductory footnotes—Maniquis sustains that "Rime" is a poem "of the revolutionary 1790s" but not overtly *about* it, his interpretation of the Mariner's murder of the albatross as a depcition of pure "violence as yet untransformed" and "not yet fitted into the discourse of symbolic exchange" facilitates the view that, indeed, the violent activity of Parts I-III is the raw and prothetical foundation of Coleridge's poem (390).

One after one, by the star-dogg'd Moon,

Too quick for groan or sigh,

Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,

And cursed me with his eye.[79]

Significantly, this is the first use of the word "curse" in the poem; it is neither the hanging of the albatross about the Mariner's neck nor the cast die of the deathly twain which Coleridge chooses to deem hexes, but this moment wherein the comrades of the Mariner—incapable of even "groan or sigh"—communicate their vexations with their sight rather than with their voices.

We must also not overlook the sailors' impairment of speech here, for it is the implications of this speechlessness, I contend, which constitute the dominant curse of the poem. To elaborate: In this inability to communicate with his fellow humans through language, I argue the Mariner falls into a desperate isolation within which the eyes of his comrades serve as sore reminders that he has become utterly disconnected from the glimmering light of life they once held. Isolation, therefore, is the curse, and the sailors' eyes operate as its manifestation and perpetuation. But if there's any doubt that alienation is the true blight upon the Mariner, let his own words weigh in:

Alone, alone, all, all alone,

Alone on a wide, wide sea!

And never a saint took pity on

My soul in agony.[80]

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[79] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 212-215. Stanza 49.

[80] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 232-35. Stanza 54.

Perhaps he may need to speak the word a fifth time to be completely sure, but I think the Mariner really does feel *alone*. Heightening this sense of solitude is the sheer amount of end-stops in this stanza and stanza 49 quoted just above. Specifically, that so many of these breaks are generated with commas suggests that the Mariner is creating pauses within his speech in a desperate hope some soul may interject to fill the gaps in his words and deliver him from isolation in language.

But the Mariner's epizeuxis devolves into utter tautology as each of the five stanzas that follow his articulation of solitude have little other effect than to reiterate what is already known: that the Mariner's many men "all dead did lie" and that "a thousand slimy things / lived on; and so did [he]."[81] No more is the Mariner's redundancy in isolation evident, however, than in his account that he spends a full seven days fixed on the accursed eyes of his silenced crew:

> Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
>
> And yet I could not die.[82]

The major repetitions within this arc of solitude concretize the impression that, indeed, the ardor with which the Mariner embarked on his journey has turned stale with the loss of not only the guiding light of the sun, but now also the efficacy of his communicative powers. Recalling again and again the lack of life within his crewmates' eyes, the Mariner's tautological narrative exhausts the capacities of language but does little in the way of moving his account forward.[83]

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[81] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 237-239.

[82] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 261-262.

[83] Though his sway on my writing may be most evident within this page, I wish to assure that the work of Ewan James Jones courses through the veins of this whole thesis. In addition to providing the blueprint of formal analysis from which I learned to model my own close-reading of "The Ancient Mariner" in this and all other sections, Jones' account of the poem's tautological features also had a significant bearing on how I came to understand the relation between revolutionary stagnation amid still increased violence. In particular, I have in mind the following proposal by Jones: "the tale is dictated by a dual logic: the world is consistently reduced to *das Immerwiedergleiche*, to the ever-selfsame; at the same time, the interruptions or or punctuations of that world prove increasingly violent" (174). Though Jones goes on to cite such tautology (and specifically the "seven days, seven nights…" quoted above) as an indication that the dominant curse of the poem is "the successive inability to die"—and thus posits an alternative view to my own interpretation that the curse of the poem is communicative alienation—this difference in reading does little to negate the influence that Jones' "Coleridge and the Philosophy of Poetic Form" has on this thesis (184).

Only when the Mariner turns toward the slimy snakes does the stagnant impotence of his narrative begin to fade. Recounting their "rich attire" and how their "every track / Was a flash of golden fire," the Mariner's description of the snakes is characterized by an almost sublime infatuation with the creatures' colorful activity that finally gets the Mariner and readers alike out of the rut of repetition.[84] It is beyond the confines of the ship, then, that the ancient man seems to find that which reinvigorates his faculty of language and begins to set him upon the renewed course of his journey. But even as the Mariner's speech to the Guest is revitalized and the story seems now at a turn, he still has not reached the cathartic moment of his story—curse has not yet given way to blessing. Such deliverance arrives only after what seems like divine intervention:

> O happy living things! No tongue
> Their beauty might declare
> A spring of love gush'd from my heart
> And I bless'd them unaware:
> Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
> And I bless'd them unaware.[85]

The hints that an agency beyond that of the Mariner's is at play in this moment of epiphanic release are embedded within the very body of the stanza. Looking especially at the rhyme scheme, that each of the unrhymed lines ends on an indication of the human body (the tongue, the heart, and the Mariner himself as "me") suggests bodily alienation from that which possesses the dominant pull in this stanza; it is something from without the Mariner's body that generates the rhyme giving this stanza its harmony and that allows the tale to resume its forward progress.

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[84] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 278-281.

[85] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 282-87.

In further corroboration of the Mariner's lack of agency here, the lines that do rhyme draw the Mariner's "declare" closer in association with his status as "unaware" of the fact that he's even bestowing a blessing upon the snakes (apparently so unaware is he of this fact that Coleridge opts for an identical rhyme to make us doubly aware of such oblivion).

Again though, there's little better evidence than the Mariner's own speech. In his insistence that "sure [his] kind saint took pity" on him, it is all but confirmed that, indeed, a divine force has pulled the Mariner from out of the curse of non-communicative isolation and into the blessing of love through language. The evolution of language past its crude beginning as an implement of curses and into its more polished fashioning as a dispenser of blessings thus seems predicated on a divine inhabitation that teaches the Mariner's otherwise unsuitable frame how to wield the weight of his words.

With water snakes blessed and the Mariner now instructed on the blessing of language, the sailor's journey seems back in full swing. The albatross falls from his neck, the restoration of rain and wind bring the ship's sails back into activity, and even the crewmates are temporarily reanimated by "a troop of spirits blest" that, while still not allowing them conversation, at the very least gives the sailors the groans they had been deprived of in death.[86] Indeed, the blessing of the water snakes is so potent that the very sun which the Mariner's crude and violent speech had prior castigated rises again, bringing with it sweet sounds from the sailors' corpses:

> Around, around, flew each sweet sound,
>
> Then darted to the Sun;
>
> Slowly the sounds came back again,
>
> Now mix'd, now one by one.[87]

[86] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 349.

[87] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 354-57.

The assertion of language's divinity is no more conspicuous than in this moment. Through lines of perfectly balanced trimeter-tetrameter alternation and through the rhyme's union of the "sun" with "one," the stanza is if to declare that harmony is found in the acknowledgment that, like the sounds of the sailors, ordered language is borrowed from heaven and to it will eventually return.

And yet, much else of the structural features within (as well as beyond) the fifth part of the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" pose a resistance to the interpretation that the Mariner's blessing catalyzes a wholesale restoration of harmony with nature. Recalling the data points presented in Section II of the paper, we observe that Part V contains not less structural irregularities relative to the parts that precede it (as the poem's language would suggest there should be if there were content-structure continuity), but instead a marked spike in entropy within its structure. Again, and as we saw within the arcs leading up to the castigation of the sun in the previous section, there is a significant disconnect between what the poem's language conveys and what its structure conveys. This time, however, I diagnose the issue not simply as the Mariner's misapplication of language as a violent implement against nature, but rather as his fallacious assessment of language as entirely separate in origin from nature—it is his alienation of speech into the realm of the divine that generates its separation from form.

The impetus of this movement from language as a traducer of nature to language as an approximation of the divine, then, is that which I seek to lay Boehme's second realm—the "Fire World"—upon. Encompassing both the Dark and Light Fire of language, curses and blessings, the Fire World possesses that "flash of golden fire" which ultimately allows movement away from the anguish of the Dark World and into the love of light. Thus, it is only by coming into experience with the dual nature of language that the Mariner learns of its proper application.

It is important to mark, however, the bounds of this superimposition; I define the transformation of language across Parts III-V as culminating not in an epiphanic realization of language's wholesale derivation from divinity (the view I've just argued Coleridge is proposing in these parts) but rather as a realization of language's ability to merely *approximate* the divine, without necessarily having to hail from within it. This, as readers will recall, is to preserve language's status as both within nature and as synchronous with form (the former of which Boehme champions). Nevertheless, there is a second structure at play now, the pentad, whose completion will require adherence to the Coleridgean conceptualization of proper language as a divine dispensation. So let us entertain the bounds of the pentadic form to its completion, before ultimately reconfiguring the heart of the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and applying unto it a completely de-hybridized schema of Boehme's "Seven Forms."

We recall, finally, the contention that the pentad is the core from which Coleridge generates a contemplative manual to be employed in the instruction of Europe's *sans-culottes* and that the efficacy of such instruction hinges on the Mariner evolving into a fictionalized Robespierre who fulfills the redemptive arc the revolutionary himself was never able to live out. Having now explored the parts of the poem over which I argue this transfiguration occurs, I'd like to qualify the section's earlier determination that it was poets who would carry out Robespierre's redemptive arc as it was imagined through the Mariner with a further proposal that it was one poet in particular who took up Robespierre's redemption: Coleridge himself. Aside from the fact that his authorship of "Rime" identifies him as the obvious architect of the manual I argue he communicates through the Mariner, Parts III-V reveal deeper parallels between the ancient sailor and his poetic creator.

We may take, for example, the Mariner's solitude. Especially after France's invasion of Switzerland in January of 1798 but definitely before then too, Coleridge's hopes for the Revolution had been utterly shattered. The betrayals of the Revolution, Fulford corroborates, left Coleridge "dispirited" and "alienated from his own nation and its revolutionary neighbor."[88] If we think back to the Mariner's quadripartite cry of loneliness in futile language, it is not beyond possibility that Coleridge felt a like alienation throughout his composition of "Rime" and amid the collapse of the politics of revolution he had so staunchly clung to. But if "Rime" represents Coleridge's reconfiguration of revolutionary language against its misapplication as a beckoning of violence that ruins our bond to nature, Parts III-V suggest that such a reconfiguration remains centered on Coleridge's insistence that "general illumination should precede Revolution."[89]

To elaborate, let us revisit the catalyst for the Mariner's own resumed activity: the blessing of the seasnakes. With his guiding light gone and his crewmates dead, the Mariner is left to confront his existence among the thousand "slimy things" beneath him. If we reconsider the depiction of the masses in Gillray's "Un Petit Souper"—and their viscid cannibalism—alongside Coleridge's description of the water snakes, "slimy" seems a perfect encapsulation of the *sans-culotte* imagery circulating in historical proximity to the composition of "Rime." But regardless of how slobbish he finds the snakes, divine forces nevertheless nudge the Mariner toward their sanctification. This seems now a compelling parallel to Coleridge's avowal that the poet, in his proximity to divine language, must illuminate the masses toward non-violent reform. All we would need to confirm this parallel is for the water snakes to join in on the Mariner's hymns by the end of the poem. We unfortunately get no such fun—but let us nevertheless move on from the lateral axis of the pentad and into the synthetical point of divine contemplation.

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[88] Fulford, "Slavery and Superstition in the Supernatural Poems," 45.

[89] Kitson, "Political Thinker," 162.

5. Sign of the Cross: Evaluating the Divine Dialogue of Parts V-VII

The prior two sections have concerned themselves first with arguing that Parts I-III of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" demonstrate that form-content integrations fail under enactments of revolutionary violence and, second, with proposing that the subsequent three parts of the poem paint the separation of language from nature as that which will instruct in the way of nonviolent reform. I have likened the Mariner's divinely instructed blessing of the watersnakes to Coleridge's insistence that the god-given speech of poets must illuminate paths toward peaceful revolution as a way to limn his position that poetic language is alienated from nature and that it— as this supernatural phenomenon—grants true access to divine doctrine. Contrary to those revolutionaries who "had inscribed the cross of Christ with human gore," Coleridge's poetic language seeks to let divinity etch itself onto the words of the poet and in this way become a beacon of guidance toward right, peaceful reform.[90] The present section will measure the success of this reconfiguration of language by evaluating the extent to which the manifestation of dialogue in Parts V-VII does or does not resolve the circuitous stagnations that characterize much of the narrative up to this point.

The reanimation of sailors, sun, and sail following the Mariner's blessing and with which we left off seems an early indication that, indeed, the ancient man's divine speech has delivered him from alienated torpidity and illuminated a path upon which the Mariner may renew his relationship with nature. Even as the noon Sun again momentarily stalls the ship and fixes "her to the ocean," the ship proves so determined on progress that it rocks "with a short uneasy motion" until its "sudden bound" hurls the Mariner into such extreme and vigorous movement that he falls into a "swound."[91]

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[90] Kitson, "Coleridge, the French Revolution and the Ancient Mariner: A Reassessment," 36.

[91] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 384-92.

From this unrelenting forward bound is born the Mariner's first account of direct dialogue within his retrospective narrative. Though still dazed by the ship's sudden lurch, the Mariner recalls that his "soul discern'd / Two voices in the air" proclaiming foremost that: "The man hath penance done, / and penance more will do."[92] Here, the foretelling that the Mariner has further penance to pay immediately casts doubt on the initial impression that the ship's progress is a marker of expiation. More than challenging the reader's instinct to take the ship's resumed movement as an indication that the Mariner is absolved from his crime against nature, however, the dialogue between the voices also intimates a deeper issue in the Mariner's choice to let disembodied forces navigate his speech. Specifically, such disembodied dialogue falters in its generation of mutually reciprocal conversation; the voices speak across to each other, but nevertheless seem inattentive to the contents of the other's speech.

We may take, for instance, the first voice's inquiry as to "What makes that ship drive on so fast? What is the Ocean doing?" and the second's strange response that

> Still as a slave before his lord,
>
> The Ocean hath no blast;
>
> His great bright eye is most silently
>
> Up to the moon is cast—."[93]

Revealing only that it is *not* the ocean that is driving the ship fast, the second voice's reply skirts around the first's question and fixates instead on the Mariner's silent gaze upon the moon, conflating ocean and seaman with the ambiguous "his." Likewise, the second stanza of the second voice's speech goes on only to suggest that the moon guides the ambiguous "him."

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[92] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 396-97, 408-09.

[93] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 412-417.

This, of course, is no satisfying explanation for the first voice's inquiry as to what *drives* the ship forward. So it asks instead for the motive: "But why drives on that ship so fast [...]?" to which the second voice replies: "The air is cut away before, / And closes from behind."[94] While not as aloof as its prior response, the second voice here still nevertheless fails to speak in accurate reply to the first's inquiry. It reveals not why or what drives the Mariner's ship forward, but how.

What are we to make of this confusing exchange between the two disembodied voices? On one hand, I argue it helps Coleridge emphasize the limits of non-divine communication he is turning away from. Whereas the voices sustain dialogue without binding their speech to that of another's, the Mariner's words up to this point in his retrospective tale had been unable to spark any kind of meaningful dialogue at all. In having two bodiless voices preserve a communicative medium hitherto absent in the poem, Coleridge is as if to suggest that divine dialogue—in all its abstraction—still has a leg up over a communicative mode tied to material structures.

But on the other hand, Coleridge seems aware that this divine language is unforgiving to human consciousness. Though the Mariner approximates this speech only after being launched into unprecedented forward progress, his frame is so confounded by such unrelenting velocity that the most he manages is lending his dazed mind to these abstract voices of heaven. The second spirit's insight that "the air is cut away before, and closes from behind" perhaps sheds light on why the Mariner is unable to withstand these catalyzing forces of divine language.

If, as Coleridge suggests, the only way for our lethargic bodies to keep pace with the furious demands of revolutionary change (aside from enacting radical violence) is to seek out a divine language that is not bound to material limitations, it makes sense that the human frame would be yet more ill-equipped to keep up with the fleeting opportunities for dialogue generated within a supernatural realm that itself is so swiftly "cut away before, and closes from behind."

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[94] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 422-425.

In other words: as the basis of language becomes alien to the structures within which it operates, so too do its products. The result, as seen in the Mariner, is a dazed disconnect from the material. Again, we find corroboration of this analysis embedded within the structure of "Rime."

First Voice:

But why drives on that ship so fast,

Without or wave or wind?

Second Voice:

The air is cut away before.

And closes from behind.[95]

Looking specifically at the diminutive nature of stanzas 96 and 97 (reproduced above) that the final lines dedicated to the dialogue between the two voices seem the product of Coleridge merely halving a stanza that would otherwise conform to the poem's typical form reinforces his contention that the success of divine speech is not contingent upon its possession of a structural basis. These stanzas, I argue, most conspicuously embody Coleridge's desire to wrest the content of "Rime" away from its form—despite his simultaneous awareness that such a move requires the abstraction of language from the material realm. For even as they communicate across the poem's two shortest and most structurally lame stanzas, the two voices achieve a unique dialogue that the Mariner can access so long as he too exists outside of and disconnected from the structures within which he operates. Such alienated existence, however, is unsustainable; the second voice foretells as much in its assurance that "slow and slow that ship will go, / When the Mariner's trance is abated."[96]

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[95] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 422-25. Stanzas 96 and 97.

[96] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 428-29.

Indeed, the Mariner's ship slows upon the dissolution of his trance—but reemerging alongside the Mariner's consciousness is the ghastly gaze of his dead crewmates. The curse resumes. Though a breeze would resume the ship's motion once the Mariner turned his eyes from the dead sailors—"like one that one [...] turns no more his head; / Because he knows a frightful fiend / Doth close behind him tread"—this mere turning of a back hardly seems like an answer to stagnation anyone can be satisfied with.[97] With the daze of divine dialogue proven unsustainable, the sailor must again endeavor to make progress against the reality of his past violence; but will Coleridge's solution be so bathetic so as to culminate in the Mariner timidly ignoring the curses at his back and letting nature's breeze sweetly guide him home? Is Coleridge's alternative to violence just this lame surrender to the very nature his poetic language should be conquering? Analysis of the Mariner's dialogue with the Hermit will answer in the negative.

As the Mariner nears his home harbor, Coleridge introduces three new characters—the Pilot, his boy, and the Hermit—as witnesses to the dissolution of all material evidence of the ancient sailor's journey. Marking first the ascension of "those lights so many and fair" which had reanimated the now dead-again sailors, our new figures soon afterward collect the body of the Mariner, who stunned anew "by that loud and dreadful sound" which sank his ship, becomes the sole physical remnant of this supernatural tale.[98] And yet the Mariner remains grossly ill-equipped to speak on the illumination of his journey, for the mere movement of his lips upon his awakening suffices to drive the Hermit into prayer, the Pilot "into a fit," and the Pilot's boy into such madness that he identifies the Mariner as proof that "the Devil knows how to row."[99] Clearly, the sailor remains poorly instructed in Coleridge's prescribed dialogue.

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[97] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 446-51.

[98] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 525, 550.

[99] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 561, 569.

It is not until the Mariner sets foot on the "firm land" of his home country that he makes another attempt at dialogue—and succeeds.[100] Placed as the (anti)thesis to that devilish motion of the mouth which is censored and unintelligible to readers, Coleridge embraces the Mariner's next attempt at speech with direct quotation marks as if to signify that finally, upon homeward return, the sailor's words have become fit enough for incorporation into poetic language:

"O Shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!"[101]

Indeed, the Mariner's most perfect words are those that plead for reconciliation with the divine, that ask relentlessly for a penance by which the heavens might bestow their light, that signal a desperate thirst only to be slaked by the beneficent hand of God. It is Coleridge's argument, after all, that progress is found in the brilliant divinity of poetic language. In submitting his speech as an expression of his desire to approximate such divinity, the Mariner takes an immense step toward himself accessing that magical language to which even the land he treads upon is subservient. He finds a second success in the Hermit's reciprocation of speech:

"I bid thee, say—What manner of man art thou?"[102]

Even as wary as it seems, the Hermit's question is, solely on its merit as a reply to the Mariner's words, an important indicator that the sailor's curse of communicative alienation is on the brink of breaking. Having returned to the stable footing of material nature, the Mariner is at the site upon which he may not only employ speech but also find those who will respond to his words. On another level though, the Hermit's interrogation seems to throw the Mariner into an awareness that his status as an embodied being contradicts his desire to approximate the nature of an immaterial divinity. Upon receiving the Hermit's question, the Mariner recounts that:

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[100] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 570.

[101] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 574.

[102] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 577.

Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched

With a woeful agony,

Which forced me to begin my tale;

And then it left me free."[103]

That the Mariner was "forced" to tell his tale—this very poem—by what seems a violent revulsion to his recognition as a materialized being has no small significance. Unlike the two disembodied voices who narrated the ship's incredible forward blast, the Mariner's speech must necessarily rise from within his frame and so is incapable of properly recreating that dissociation from material origins that lets the unbound voices capture the supernatural progress of the Mariner's movement. Reminded that he is bound to this "manner of man," the Mariner responds with a loss of agency over that which binds him to material nature—his very body—and only then is compelled to illuminate as to his journey. This agonizing incompatibility between material agency and divine approximation, I argue, is the penance of the Mariner. Recognizing that his escape from communicative alienation entails adopting a language that his fleshy structure writhes in perpetual hindrance of, the Mariner comes to know of the price to be paid for his reentry into the material nature he seeks to exert his speech upon. And so, till his "ghastly tale is told" the "heart within [him] burns."[104]

Put another way, the Mariner must become alienated from his body and render it a vessel of that divine language to which he finds no other alternative mode of communication—he must exchange alienation from external nature with alienation from himself. Thus, as Coleridge with "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," our ancient man wrenches language from structure to amplify its divine luminosity and to bestow upon nature strange and unprecedented speech.

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[103] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 578-81.

[104] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 584-85.

But though the Mariner reaches this ultimate benchmark in the reception of his tale by the Hermit, the Wedding Guest, and those others that the moment their face he sees, he knows "must hear" him, we should not take the Mariner's "strange power of speech" as an indication that such dialogue creates the moral reform that Coleridge suggests divine poetics have a unique capacity to generate.[105] For this evaluation we consider the listener's reaction to the Mariner's tale.

Speaking finally his moral that "he prayeth best, who loveth best" the Mariner departs from his listener who himself "went like that one that hath been stunn'd"[106] With this, the poem ends. Stunned as the Wedding Guest, readers are struck with the realization that this epic tale of stagnant suns and spirit-slung sails has just culminated in what boils down to an asinine warning against shooting seabirds. And yet, this seems also the perfect note on which Coleridge may signal the triumph of his revolutionary solution. Captivating them into utter inaction, the Mariner hijacks the will of his listeners and successfully instructs them on the divine admonishment of brash violence—even if the method is so convoluted so as to seem absurd. But where I argue that the greatest folly of the poem lies is in its inability to realize that its content has been so far abstracted from a material basis that readers know not how to give this meaning form.

In his endeavor to craft a poem so defiant to structural convention that the very words within "The Rime" seem more aptly likened to an unbounded dispensation of divine language, I reiterate my contention that Coleridge succeeds in finding a language with which to bring forth the "general illumination [that] should precede Revolution." The fundamental trouble I find here is that his new language is so alienated from material structure that neither the reader nor Coleridge knows how its illuminative bestowal of non-violent instruction is meant to catalyze tangibly reformative action. We have captured the divine light but know not of its material utility.

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[105] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 589, 587.

[106] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 614, 621-623.

To provide an analogy, the two disembodied voices' inability to identify the force driving the Mariner's ship seems an inadvertent example of the confusion Coleridge's illumination casts us into. Though the two voices bestow upon the Mariner a grasp on the divinity of poetic language and ultimately even become the example by which he learns to wield this language for himself, they are ultimately still incapable of instructing the sailor as to how such speech is to be utilized for or otherwise correlates to the attainment of swift change like that which brings the Mariner home but that he is never able to exercise or even consciously experience of his own volition. Such is the frustrated haze in which Coleridge leaves readers.

Such is also the haze upon which I overlay Boehme's Light World. As it stands now, however, the poetic constituent to the Behmenist realm blending love, sound, and nature seems more akin to the dark world of bitter agony. As the Sun blinds the Mariner to the wretchedness of his violence, so too does Coleridge's illumination paradoxically darken the passage toward effective reform. It is not until we, under Boehme's direction, rekindle the fiery flash of language that I propose this cycle of obscurity may truly break. To that experiment we now turn.

6.A. Grounding the Empire of the Clouds: An Experiment in Calamity

Before applying the Behmenist hypothesis, I will first shed light as to what drove Coleridge to seek out that form-resistant language of divinity which I identify as the fatal flaw within "Rime." I've already established that Coleridge deems such poetic language the catalyst to the radical moral reform he insists must precede revolution—but why must such instruction hail from a heaven so beyond human reach that it ultimately fails as incomprehensible?

Anahid Nersessian's "Calamity Form" delivers a most compelling answer. Illuminating that "at the same exact moment in time when the ecological and human costs of industry were becoming palpable, some poets began staging their own work's competence, or rather its lack thereof, to the representation and analysis of the train of consequences set in motion by contemporary economic shifts,"[107] Nersessian argues that the tendency for disaster in Romantic poetry—such as that 'apocalyptic rate of change and nature-loss' which Geoffrey Hartman notes is "immanent to poems like those collected in *Lyrical Ballads*"[108]—signals a poetic manifestation of a "nescience" possessive of what I've identified as three features particularly relevant to my interpretation of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner": 1) its simultaneous generation from and sustenance of a "violent reorganizing of the world," 2) that it "confounds rather than clarifies the world's order," and 3) its crucial contribution to a form of calamity.[109] Making sense of this nescience, Nersessian's calamity form is the identifier, the name, of that aspect of Romantic poetry which "effects changes in how we, as embodied beings, experience the material world" and "makes those changes hard to grasp in explicative, let alone actionable, terms."[110]

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[107] Anahid Nersessian, *The Calamity Form: On Poetry and Social Life* (University of Chicago Press, 2020), 2.

[108] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 3.

[109] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 3.

[110] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 4.

There is much to unpack here. Beginning first with nescience, the term is predicated on the reality that humans cannot immediately capture changes in the ways we relate to external nature because such changes operate "at too large a scale and too vast a domain of activity."[111] Upon catching the first glimpse of the Industrial Revolution's effects, Nersessian argues, some poets turned their work toward the expression of this inability to know the full range of consequences wrought by drastic contemporary shifts. The upshot is poetry that "adopts formal strategies of abbreviation and foreclosure as it tries and fails to narrate" social transformation,[112] poetry that—if I'm to add my own spin on things—is "cut away before, and closes from behind."[113] This disfigurement is that which the calamity form gives name to; for in their floundering narration of social change, poems of the calamity form capture the very impossibility of approximating the scale and implications of a revolutionary present. More to the point, such poetry also indicates that our inability to keep pace with radical change distorts how we understand our place in the material world.

It is within this identification of nescient narratives and their disfiguring effects that I propose "The Ancient Mariner" also participates in the poetics of calamity. Though I must not miss that the "Calamity Form" is geared toward a different Revolution than that which this paper concerns itself with—the Industrial rather than the French—I don't think it too far a stretch to propose that the French Revolution, in all its hyperbolic escalations of violence, would also instill sensations of overwhelming unknowability similar to those that Nersessian proposes the Industrial Revolution created. Possessing that same "violent reorganizing" that characterized industrialization, the French Terror may have acted as yet another generator of nescience.

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[111] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 3.

[112] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 4.

[113] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, ll. 424-425.

If this is true, we may newly understand Coleridge's representation of structurally alienated language within "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as 1) his nescient response to those flashes of fiery carnage that characterized the French Revolution and 2) his simultaneous acknowledgment of and solution to this very limited perception of change that so hinders a poet's desire to fully grasp the present within which they live. This first point finally answers why Coleridge's radical reconfiguration of language would emerge as the product of revolution; it is how he copes with his inability to keep pace with revolution's "apocalyptic rate of change and nature-loss." However, in elevating language to a supernatural status, I'd argue Coleridge adds another dimension to his engagement with nescience. For, as the second point indicates, so doing insinuates Coleridge's awareness that his limited perception as an embodied being keeps his representations of revolution bound to this very inevitable unknowing and that *bypassing* such ignorance would require an omniscient understanding of revolution. Since he is incapable of this omniscient vantage himself, Coleridge surrenders his poetic language to that realm of the divine which might lend to him accurate and all-knowing illumination as to the effects of revolution.

Having found the divine mode by which he might cast off his unknowing, why does the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" nevertheless fail to hit home? Why do the poem's words still seem, like other sufferers of nescience, to "confound rather than clarify"? Fortunately, the prerequisites for Coleridge's attempts at divine approximation allow me to answer without getting tangled up in the weeds of proving or disproving its realistic efficacy: for even if that divine realm which Coleridge seeks does exist and does dispense unto him illumination, I hope the prior section has successfully demonstrated that the attainment of such supernatural speech requires so much alienation from material bases that it becomes within them utterly strange. A disfiguration toward the divine simply exchanges unknowing for incomprehensibility.

How then is such estranged disfigurement created and sustained within the calamitous poem? Nersessian holds that it is through the poetic figure and, specifically, its possession of "an objective existence obscured by the indifferent relation it constructs between some thing and what is taken to be that thing's value."[114] This ability for the figure to blur the boundary between a thing and its value, Nersessian elaborates, can be taken as a simulation of our relationship with debt in that it "allows humans to communicate over and above their actual semantic capacity."[115] In its status as representational language, the poetic figure thus enables communication that is imprecise as much as it is impermanent to real human capacities—it is "a structural device that creates disorder" and thereby "holds the poem back from referential extension into the world."[116]

My work would be cut out for me if I could attribute the entropic opacity of "Rime" I have been tussling with to its possession of the figurative corollaries Nersessian describes here. Such a conclusion, however, would be untrue to the progression of my analyses thus far, considering foremost that the two devices from whose vantage I've explored "Rime"—-repetition and dialogue—are not themselves figurative. What I will argue though is that the specific way in which I've framed my discussions of repetition and dialogue enables us to view the devices as unveiling the presence of the very same consequences that the figure enacts in other poems of calamitous form: that in my demonstrations that Coleridge's utilizations of repetition and dialogue run contrary to—and ultimately become unconcerned with—the effects the structure he employs them within suggest they should have, they unmask a disfiguration in the boundary between object and value.

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[114] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 13.

[115] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 13.

[116] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 15, 18.

This argument begins with the premise that if one is to place the origin of poetic language in the supernatural, as Coleridge does, such language becomes a borrowed over-extension of expressive capability. It, in other words, becomes entirely figurative. As such an object of figuration, I contend that Coleridge's supernaturally derived poetic language in *itself* becomes that which "holds the poem back from referential extension." Under such circumstances, wherein language devolves into an unreliable measure of poetry's objective existence, we are rendered only one other recourse by which to tether a poem back to reference: by taking its manifestation to us as letter upon paper as a signal that, even if its words are obscure borrowings born of a capacity without ourselves, such a poem still nevertheless manages to exist in our material world. It is by taking stock of its form, then, that we might try to reinstate Coleridge's divine poetic language back into comprehensible materiality. And fail. Because, again, the generation and sustenance of that divine language that enables Coleridge to break from the fetter of nescience requires wholesale alienation from structure. As the repetitive constancy of the revolutionary Sun's cycles betrays the fluctuations of form, as the speech of the disembodied voice shatters the stanza that tries to contain it, and as the Mariner's poetic speech tries to wrest word from body, so too does divine language wrestle and resist against structure until it is finally unbound by it. So too does it split form from content.

From this schism between form and content is thus born an obfuscation identical to the one the figure creates. To be clear, the devices with which I've made my argument—repetition and dialogue—are not themselves the agents of disfiguration; they are, rather, facilitative points of analysis from which I've tried to shed light on the ways that the necessity for Coleridge's divine language to be born of alienation from structure creates catastrophic and irreconcilable opacity. Such strange speech, then, is to structure as the figure is to non-Coleridgean language.

For as the figure allows us to tap into a communicative ability that transcends the typical capacities of human language, so too is Coleridge's supernatural language intended to transcend the typical capacities of human structures. The result is also the same: a borrowing of language that acknowledges the ignorance of embodied existence. In the case of Coleridge, however, he utilizes such borrowed language to not only concede to nescience but also to try and dismantle it. The stun and daze that "Rime" creates is evidence that this project is unsuccessful.

The gloss of the 1834 text, for which I chose this version of the poem as the basis of my analyses, I now propose is Coleridge's attempt to bring the text back into referential extension. Playing on the translation of parataxis as, in the rawest sense of the word, a "placing side by side," I will make the case that the gloss acts as a pseudo-paratactical structure enacting greater disjunction between form and content in much the same manner that Nersessian's consideration of typical parataxis demonstrates that the figure wrestles language away from signification.[117]

Let us begin then with Nersessian's observation that the "expansive, hyperbolically omniscient poetics" parataxis enables "tends to insist upon the extreme isolation of the poet, who stands amid a world of things but not among them."[118] This is the precise consequence of Coleridge's addition of gloss to "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Though the contents of the gloss communicate the poem from the vantage of an omniscient third-person speaker, this eagle-eyed narrator is, of course, not themselves a participant in the tale they speak of. As the words of the gloss stand physically separate from the poetry it describes, so too does its narrator find themselves alienated from the poetic arc they seem to have such a clear-eyed view over.

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[117] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "parataxis (n.)," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1190500279. In further justification of this interpretation of the gloss-verse relation as a pseudo-paratactic structure, we may note that, as in the clauses of the paratactical sentence, there is no sign of coordination between the gloss and verse of "Rime." On a narrative level, readers have no indication as to which between the gloss and the verse offers the more authoritative account. And yet more chaotically than in even typical parataxis, we're lost as to how the two bodies relate to each other on the structural level; should we read the poem first, then return to the gloss? vice-versa? Simultaneously?

[118] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 28.

The cause is already half-lost. Understanding the gloss as a more visible structure from which the narrator might save the poem from total incomprehensibility, that the one who stands upon this vantage is non-participant in that which they seek to relate is an early indication that access to the divine is not equivalent to its actualization. The best our narrator can hope for is that their words will succeed in communicating illumination through a medium that does not suffer from the same content-form mutilations that Coleridge tortures the poetic body under. Considering, however, our previous conclusion that Coleridge's divine language is contingent upon its separation from form, such speech is unsuitable to the gloss's occasion. The alternative? A gloss whose unpoetic staging altogether eliminates the risk of mismatching form and content.

By this I mean to indicate that the gloss of "Rime" doesn't try to uphold any of the poem's formal characteristics and so possesses a less specific structural basis from which it becomes easier to reconcile form and content. That is: Coleridge's generalization of the gloss into unmetered words lowers the hurdle he needs to clear to reinstate form-content continuity. This is a surprising move, considering that "if there's one thing Coleridge doesn't like in poetry, it's the sound of people talking in a cadence unmoored by prosodic discipline."[119] Why, then, do the often broken notes that Coleridge adds to the margins of "Rime" seem like the exception to this rule? I will formulate an answer in light of Nersessian's insight that:

> Poetry will inevitably stutter and stumble when faced with the question of how to get from here to there, of how to grasp at the lineaments of a future that must be nascent in the present and that the present almost utterly conceals. And yet, to abandon the desire for poetry to be better at history might be to unlock a more frightening prospect: the necessity of action against a background of ignorance.[120]

[119] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 39.

[120] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 46.

If there are two things this paper has demonstrated, they are that 1) "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a manifestation of Coleridge's "desire for poetry to be better at history," and 2) that such a desire is born from the poet's perceived duty to dispel "the necessity of action against a background of ignorance." But the poem, as we have seen, fails to make history intelligible. When this first point falters—Nersessian reveals—so does the second; the moment the poem fails to do history, the prospect of action in ignorance grows. It is on this ground that I propose the gloss's lack of prosody unveils Coleridge's priority. Unwilling to compromise on the more fundamental desire to do away with ignorant revolutionary action, Coleridge suspends the divine language of poetry in a capitulation prompted by its inability to do historical work.

In this doing of historical work, however, the gloss too falls short. Aside from a left-field comment on Josephus and Micheal Psellus,[121] the gloss does very little to encourage contextual intelligibility; on the contrary, most of the marginal notes are mere paraphrasings of the stanzas they stand beside. Further consideration of the poem's pseudo-paratactical structure will lend itself to the unraveling of why a gloss "unmoored by prosodic discipline" stumbles into the same inarticulation of history that plagues poetic language:

> Parataxis is a dialectical provocation and not a dialectical achievement: even as it creates a space inside of which seemingly discrete terms become mutually intelligible as contradictions, it nonetheless constrains the scope of their movement, so that the paratactical poem is never quite able to synthesize a new perspective or concept from the ones it has already laid out. This suggests another premise, namely that parataxis [...] sustains—evenly grimly celebrates—a certain paralysis of both thought and action.[122]

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[121] Coleridge, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* within the margin gloss beside stanzas 32-33 (ll. 131-138).

[122] Nersessian, *The Calamity Form,* 31. Jones makes a brief but resonant assessment of a sentence he locates within "Rime's" margins, whose "paratactical, unashamed tautologies" he describes as "spilling around the stanzas that [it] was supposed only to gloss (185)" Such a description, I argue, is in line with Nersessian's portrayal of parataxis as creatively impotent, while adding more weight to my proposal that the gloss has paratactic form in relation to verse.

Even as the space between the gloss and poetic body of “Rime” creates a bridge across which we may reconcile the divine language of the stanza with the profane language of the margin and thereby allows for the “seemingly discrete terms” of the poem to “become mutually intelligible as contradictions” to the terms of the gloss, the reconciliation of the two structures only reinforces the content communicated between the bodies. This is especially so in the case of “Rime,” wherein the content of one of its terms (the gloss) is already derived from the content of its second term (the poem itself). The result of such a constriction, as Nersessian suggests, is that the paratactical bridge ultimately sustains the very “paralysis of thought and action” I argue Coleridge seeks to dispel through the gloss. Again—like the Mariner under the revolutionary sun—the poem is stuck in inarticulate alienation from the nature it seeks to act upon.

This is most strange. Why, as a transcript whose content-form relation remains intact, does the gloss nevertheless fail to find mutual interaction with its external nature? Because the gloss preaches against itself. Even as the marginal notes are expressed in words that coincide with the (lack of) structure that contains them, they still communicate a poetic arc that calls upon an endeavor contrary to the nature of the gloss—they still preserve the poem’s attempt to champion a divine language born and generative of the dissolution between the very form-content synchronicities it functions within. Put differently, the gloss fails because it is a paradox that advocates against its own existence. In its paralyzed inability to speak only in favor of divine language, the gloss speaks also against the preservation of the form-content unions that allow it participation in the material world. On the upside though, it also uncovers the most persistent thorn on this paper’s side. For through the gloss’s failure, I may make a case against the impression that the dis/union of form and content is only the determinant of the extent to which Coleridgean poetics finds or loses interpenetration with nature.

6.B. Grounding the Empire of the Clouds: The Back to Boehme

Specifically, this argument makes the proposal that, in addition to form-content considerations, we must also be wary of the divine origin within which Coleridge locates his poetic language—because as this section has demonstrated, the existence of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner's" language outside of a material realm maims its ability to either be effected or effect upon an external nature. On the one hand, we have seen how Coleridge's divinely-inspired language is at its core a totalizing figuration of speech whose birth outside of the structures it seeks to participate within requires a wrenching of form from content (a non-effect by nature) which ultimately also precludes it from relation to those structures (a non-effect unto nature). And on the other hand, the gloss reveals that even if the form-content relation remains *ostensibly* accordant with and born from the structures it desires extension into (an effect by nature), it will nevertheless exist as an impotent contradiction to its own being and efficacy as it toils under the task of tying strange and supernatural speech to the very materiality such language requires separation from (a non-effect unto nature).

Thus, I hold that 1) form-content continuity lacks interrelation with nature only insofar as language is believed to originate *outside* of nature and that 2) form-content continuity is a crucial prerequisite for interrelation with nature but, again, not its only determinant. Poetic interpenetration with nature, in other words, requires form-content continuity based upon a language that exists within and because of nature rather than above and despite it. Beginning with the posterior requirement, reinstating language as a phenomenon within and for nature seems to require either tearing it from its divine origin or locating the divine as natural rather than supernatural. Boehme is an advocate of the latter proposition.

To use Hegel's account of the philosopher, Boehme argued for "placing the intellectual world within one's own mind and heart, and of experiencing and knowing and feeling in one's own self-consciousness all that formerly was conceived as Beyond."[123] Wanting also to "comprise everything in an absolute unity," Boehme intertwined this proposal that our self-conscious bodies are encapsulations of the "Beyond" with a push to consider how the "whole of nature, with all the powers which are in nature, [...] also heaven and earth and all whatsoever is therein, and all that is above the heavens, is together the Body and Corporeity of God."[124] Here, we have the pantheistic cosmology Coleridge rejects—the order in which God is in all and in which the divine resides within a nature that itself includes all faculty and power.

In a further demolition of the alienating barrier between divinity and nature, Boehme warns against the perception of the divine as materially inert: "You must not think that God who is in heaven and above heaven does there stand and hover like a power and quality which has in it neither reason nor knowledge, as the sun which turns around in its circle and shoots forth from itself heat and light, whether it be for benefit or hurt to earth and its creatures."[125] Though this presentation of the divine as participatory in material nature is an immense stepping stone from which we may argue that self-conscious faculties like language not only originate in nature but also effect changes within such materiality, it also complicates the question as to why antithetical counterparts to divinity exist in reality (and therefore also in God). Boehme, however, is quick to reason that "no thing can become manifest to itself without opposition; for if it has nothing to withstand it, it always goes forward on its own account and does not go back within itself."[126]

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[123] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy: Vol. 3. Medieval and Modern Philosophy* trans. Elizabeth Sanderson Haldane and Frances H. Simson (Lincoln London Univ. Of Nebraska Press, 1995), 191.

[124] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* 196, 200.

[125] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* 201.

[126] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* 203.

Under the premise that opposition is a prerequisite for self-recognition, Boehme taps into what Hegel declares "the utmost depths of divine essence"—the idea that evil is the true "Being-for-self" which, once understood as having existence "in mind alone," allows the divine being to understand itself as the "fire which absorbs all things."[127] In this recognition of itself as an all-encapsulating force, "the eternal One becomes majestic and a light,"[128] a unifying agent which Hegel, quoting Boehme, identifies as:

> The return to the One. "Thereby" (through fire) "the eternal power becomes desirous and effectual and" (fire) is the original condition" (essence) "of the sensitive" (feeling) "life where in the Word of power an eternal sensitive life first takes its origin. For if life had no sensitiveness, it would have nor will or efficacy; but pain" – anguish, suffering – first "makes it (all life) "effectual and endows it with will. And the light of such kindling through fire makes it joyous, for it is anointment," joy and loveliness "of painfulness."[129]

It is by anointment in the flame of suffering, then, that divinity comes into feeling life. Yet more compelling, however, is Boehme's declaration that because the "world is none other than the essence of God made creaturely," we creaturely beings who are formed "so that the heavenly *Corpus* may be 'intelligibly' formed" can also kindle "through great motion or elevation" the fire of anguish which illuminates and endows human life with will.[130] Through the experience of great motion—such as that which revolution generates—we thus can start on a path upon which we can ultimately make manifest intelligible formations of divine light.

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[127] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* 206.

[128] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* 207.

[129] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* 207-08.

[130] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* 211, 208.

In adapting Boehme's model, we therefore succeed not only in reconfiguring the imaginative faculties Coleridge attributes to high divinity as "powers which are in nature," but also in finding instruction for such powers. Because the "world is none other than the essence of God turned creaturely" and because divinity itself resides within rather above nature, we may restore all those powers that Coleridge places above humanity's capacity back into nature. Thus, we attain one of the two crucial components I hold are necessary for poetic interpenetration with nature: a language that exists within and because of nature rather than above and in control of it.

The second component, form-content continuity, will be a little more difficult to grasp within the context of Boehme, considering Hegel's criticism that "the speculative truth" Boehme wants to offer requires "thought and the form of thought [...] but it is just this form of thought that is lacking to him."[131] This is where the translation of Boehme's model unto "Rime" will help. Because though the poem itself remains irreconcilably discontinuous in form and content, the pentadic form established earlier in the paper remains suitable as a tool from which we may give structure to the Behmenist model. What follows, then, is a superposition upon a superposition: the hybridization of "Rime's" failed pentadic form in favor of Boehme.

Taking the pentadic terms and substituting them with the three Behemenist realms that correspond to each of the three arcs I divided the poem into—such that the prothetical activity of Parts I-III becomes the Dark World, the thetical, mesothetical, and antithetical points of blessings, language, and curses in Parts III-V become, respectively, Dark Fire, Flash of Fire, and Light Fire, and the synthetical divine contemplation of Parts V-VII becomes the Light World—we construct a semi-accurate model detailing the necessary interrelationships between the suffering of the Dark World and the Love of the Light World.

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[131] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* 193.

There is, however, one major and fatal incompatibility between the Coleridgean pentad and Boehme's conceptualization of his spirits as "in great Love [playing] together, embracing struggling and wrestling with the other."[132] It is that the pentadic form creates no outlet from which the synthesis found in the Light World may flow back into interrelation with the darkness that engenders it; divine contemplation has no way back to material reality. This blockage, born from Coleridge's rejection of Boehme's proposal that the profane exists in the divine just as the divine exists in the profane, is the very one that disallows our poor Mariner from utilizing his strange power of speech in any actionable way and which disallows Coleridge to champion over the human condition of unknowing. In locking the murky depths of material existence away from interrelation with the divine, so too has Coleridge cast a veil over embodied existence which, while not thick enough to keep our eyes from glimmering as blind beholders of divine light, distorts enough to keep us from ever making sense of such illumination. Nevertheless, the fix is rather simple, at least within the form of the pentad, and requires only the addition of a lower longitudinal axis connecting the synthesis with mesothesis. The final result is this:

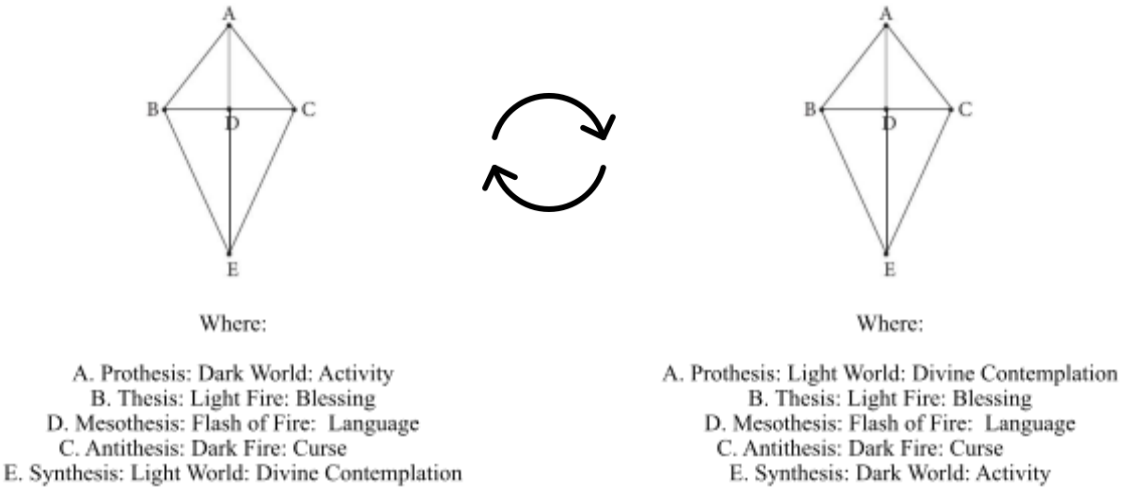


Fig. 8 — The hybridized pentadic form, in favor of Boehme

[132] Cheyne, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy*, 151.

Here we must also remind ourselves that fixed hierarchical positions do not exist in the Behmenist schema; while the first pentadic form paints the passage from dark to light, such is not the ultimate end-goal. What we desire is, as is delineated by the inversion of the second form, the reciprocal passage of light to dark so that we may not only make intelligible use of revelation in the material world but also reorient ourselves to the opportunity of light anew. This is an eternally evolutionary cycle of experience, revelation, and revolution.

But what of language? What role does the intermediary flash of fire play in this evolutionary cycle between light and dark? Boehme will answer: "Speech is the pure existence of spirit; it is a thing which when once heard goes back within itself. What has flowed out is wisdom, beginning and cause of all powers, virtue and qualities."[133] Language is that pure manifestation of spirit which once spoken pours effective power into the world—given the crucial condition that it "once heard goes back within itself." This is the condition, I argue, that the Mariner fails to fulfill. Though his speech flows out into the world, it does so in resistance to his body and outside of the structures within which he engendered it. Sunken "like lead into the sea," all physical markers of the anguish, of that great movement, which kindle the light of love within the Mariner are lost to him—he is out of reference with those catalyzing flames of dark that brought him into being with himself.[134] Reciprocally, his strange speech becomes just that: an estranged language which, finding no way back within itself, is alienated from the materiality it incomprehensibly flows out into. In its extraction from the material bases within which the Mariner's language is born, it is thus certainly unbound. But also ultimately unheard.[135]

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[133] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* 204.

[134] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* ll.291.

[135] Without necessarily arguing that the location of language outside of nature is responsible for the poem's alienation, Jones still also finds that "Rime" goes tragically unbound. It is his suggestion that "we can see this poem as inheriting Kant's modern epistemological dilemma: that knowledge would be but an adumbration of its own precepts, in the course of which the subject encounters only itself" (169).

To put it in an analogy, Boehme likens the Dark World to a candle, the Flash of Fire to the fire of the candle, and the Light World to the light of the candle.[136] Having put candle to fire, would it not be absurd to expect we could hurl the candle into the sea and still somehow remain illuminated by its light? And yet, this is the very thing the Mariner does in expecting to preserve the illumination of his "soul in agony" outside of and without material reference to the structures within which such kindling manifested.[137] Coleridge does us one worse in proposing that this kindling in itself is inspired by a supernatural saint, that the fire of the candle hails from beyond the candle's reach. But this does not do. The light of language can not be comprehensible until we place its origins and utilizations in a materiality from which it may return into itself.

The folly of both the Mariner and Coleridge, therefore, is their desire to wrench from nature an experience of revelation and imbue it instead with supernatural significance. To be clear, this is not a resistance against divinity wholesale; what I mean by the invocation of the supernatural is that which exists superior to nature, that which positions itself against Boehme's conceptualization of divinity as existing within nature. For in removing worldly experience from that nature within which it manifests, we forfeit the capacity to make tangible the results and revelations of such experience. In searching for a supernatural poetic by which to illuminate on moral reform, Coleridge forfeits a language capable of finding material effect. In taking his blessing unto the sea snakes as a sign of divine intervention rather than as a light born in opposition to his murder of the albatross, the Mariner loses the capacity to find that light within a speech not utterly strange to himself. This is a forfeiture of the fiery anointment by anguish that endows life with effectual will. We suffer through the dark and yet reap from it little utile light.

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[136] See Fig. 1 on page 14. Boehme attributes to his three domains "similtudes."

[137] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* ll. 235.

The Behmenist superposition tries to wrench "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" out of this supernaturality. It is a stent in the heart of a poem whose language is grown stagnant in the arteries of high divinity, that tries to let the poetic body become reconciled with content, that tries to let its words flow from a frame responsible for their every drop of knowledge, that says to us:

> Behold thy inward man, and then thou wilt see it most plainly and clearly, if thou art not a fool and an irrational beast. Therefore observe, in thy heart, in thy veins, and in thy brain, thou hast thy spirit; and all the powers which move in thy heart, in thy veins, and in thy brain, wherein thy life consists, signify God the Father. From that power springs up thy light, so that thou seest, understandest, and knowest in the same power what thou art to do; for that light glimmers in thy whole body; and the whole body moves in the power and knowledge of the light.[138]

[138] Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,* 213.

7. Conclusion

After nearly fourteen minutes of thundering metal, Iron Maiden ends their adaptation of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in a way that stays bitterly true to the source material. Like Coleridge, the band leaves its audience with the desolate reminder that the Mariner remains an impotent slave to unactionable speech—that "the tale goes on and on and on and on"[139] but does nothing more. By the song's end, I fear to think with Marx that

> The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service [...] to present this new scene in world history in time-honored disguise and borrowed language.[140]

I fear to think that—as the Mariner is bound to the impotent recitation of a bygone tale and as Marx finds the French helplessly clung to the knees of their revolutionary forefathers—Iron Maiden's retelling of Coleridge's tale indicates the condition of our own paralysis: that we too are crippled under a tradition of language that "weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living." The last gong of the metal ballad rings like a death knell. At its toll, the lightning-fast sound of the past quarter-hour comes crashing down. Listeners must imagine this is how the Mariner feels once his "supernatural motion is retarded."[141] This must also be how Marx imagines 19th-century France: "A nation which thought it had acquired an accelerated power of motion by means of a revolution, suddenly finds itself set back into a defunct epoch."[142]

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[139] Iron Maiden, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner - Live at Long Beach Arena," *Live After Death (1998 Remaster)*, Spotify, 12:53-13:10, Rime of the Ancient Mariner - Live at Long Beach Arena; 1998 Remaster.

[140] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," in *The Karl Marx Library, Volume One: On Revolution*, ed. and trans. Saul K. Padover (McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971), 245.

[141] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* within the marginal gloss beside stanza 98 (ll. 430-433).

[142] Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," 246.

Anxious to break the fetter of revolutionary impotence, I fear we confuse the exhilarating necromancy of a dead past for the restoration of its achievements.

This fear, however, is misplaced. We must treat "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" as a warning, not a guideline. Of course, frontman Bruce Dickinson is mostly joking when he says of the poem-turned-song: "This is what not to do if your bird shits on you."[143] But I think he might be onto something. Coleridge's poem—whether he wanted it to or not—tells us "what not to do." More than merely warning us against violence, the failure of "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" to actionably do so teaches by example that our "awakening of the dead," rather than "magnifying the given task in the imagination," makes us recoil "from its solution in reality."[144] It is a warning against efforts to fix the present with tools from without it, against the instinct to replicate an obsolete or unattainable ideal at the expense of the dereliction of the very structures within and with which we want to effect change.

Put simply, the poem's abstracted nature warns us not to look outside of our structures for the solutions to our revolutionary problems. It is to us what the French Revolution was to Coleridge: a "Beacon, that while it guides us [...] should show us the Dangers, that throng the road."[145] For even as "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" stumbles in its illumination of the path toward non-violent revolution, we may yet learn from it which dangers in the road to avoid. Though it is a divine light bright enough to blind, we can learn from this blindness that such is not the light through which we will find the revolution we seek. And once we do learn this, the poem will say to us with Marx that

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[143] Iron Maiden, "Rime of the Ancient Mariner - Live at Long Beach Arena," 0:02-0:06.

[144] Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," 246.

[145] Roe, *Wordsworth and Coleridge,* 187.

> The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past. [...] The revolution of the nineteenth century must let the dead bury their dead in order to arrive at its own content. There the phrase went beyond the content – here the content goes beyond the phrase.[146]

The last gong of Iron Maiden's adaptation does not mark our ensnarement in a "defunct epoch" dominated by the poets and language of the past. On the contrary—it is the funerary bell tolling for the death of the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Iron Maiden resuscitates the poem only to put the final nail in its coffin; to amplify the sad vacuity of the Mariner's tale and at once convince us that such cannot possibly be the generator of that "accelerated power of motion" that guides us through revolution; to finally "let the dead bury their dead." By the song's end, the light of a poem "whose phrase went beyond the content" is snuffed out. Because though the glimmering illumination of the Mariner's words captivate us, their alienation from structure eclipses, makes us blind to, the content behind them. If we wish to know content and to resume the path toward activity, we must—as Iron Maiden—first extinguish the brilliant light which hides it. We must first find our way back to the dark.

Only in this darkness will we "arrive at [our] own content." Only when we are no longer dazed by divine radiance will it be dark enough to see with Boehme "that light glimmers in thy whole body"—-that "in thy heart" are all the requisites for revolution. Once this light is kindled, so too do we learn how to generate "content that goes beyond the phrase." By synchronizing the content of a human-born phrase to the form of the human-born structure that contains it, in this way will language be able to signify past its phrase without forfeiting its referential capacities.

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[146] Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," 247.

When we reinstate language as a derivative of nature that shapes the structures it acts upon as much as it is shaped by them, only then can we launch words beyond the limitations of their meanings and still find within our human structures the means to both decipher and enact the implications of their new content. Only by submitting his strange speech to his body and to the world it seeks to participate in, may we make intelligible light of the Mariner's Rime.

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Table of the Poem's Numbers

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	Total
Stanzas	20	14	17	15	26	26	25	143
Lines	82	60	81	68	118	104	112	625
4-line Stanzas	19	12	10	9	16	22	17	105
5-line Stanzas	0	0	4	4	6	0	4	18
6-line Stanzas	1	2	2	2	4	2	4	17
X-line Stanzas	0	0	1 (9)	0	0	2 (2)	0	3
Stanza # with anomalous line count: 5 lines 6 lines **9 lines** **2 lines**	12 (1)	23 24 (2)	35 38 39 41 44 45 **48** (7)	58 60 62 63 64 65 (6)	67 72 74 77 79 82 84 86 87 89 (10)	**96** **97** 103 118 (4)	119 122 123 127 130 135 136 139 (8)	38
ABCB Stanzas	19	11	9	9	15	18	15	96
Stanza # with anomalous rhyme: XAXA ABAB XABBA ABAAB AXAXAX XAABXB ABABAB AABCCBDDB **identity-rhyme** *Slant rhyme*	12 (1)	**23** **24** 29 (3)	**35** 38 39 **41** 44 45 48 51 (8) 50	58 60 62 63 64 **65** (6) 54?	67 72 73 74*!* 75 77 79 82 84 86 87 89 (11)	96-97 103 104 110 114 117 118 (8)	119 122 123 *125* 127 130 135 136 139 *140* (10)	52 96+52=148/143 stanzas The excess 5 stanzas are due to the inclusion of ABCB stanzas that have anomalous rhyme, such as those with slant/identity rhymes
Meter-adherent lines	68	46	61	45	89	85	95	489
Line # with anomalous meter: 6 syllables 7 syllables 9 syllables 8 syllables 12 syllables 10 syllables	2 3 13 16 30 32 38 46 65 69 71 72 74 80 (14	87 88 90 93 99 116 118 120 122 131 132 133 134 141 (14)	160 165 170 178 179 181 183 188 191 192 196 205 208 209 211 213 215 217 218 224 (20)	229 230 233 234 235 239 245 246 250 251 252 253 261 262 266 267 272 276 281 282 286 287 288 (23)	295 296 301 315 316 319 320 321 326 334 335 337 338 349 350 362 367 371 375 379 383 385 387 389 394 397 399 403 404 (29)	412 414 420 428 430 432 434 436 438 458 460 461 463 469 476 481 494 504 507 (19)	518 519 529 536 537 542 547 553 570 578 580 588 590 594 597 599 605 (17)	136 My definition of "meter-adherent" refers to lines that follow the pattern of alternation between tetrameter and trimeter, so even hexasyllabic and octosyllabic lines that occur out of this alternation (for example, if there are two hexasyallabic lines in a row) are included here as lines that break the meter. There are other factors inevitable in scansion that leave my determinations as to which lines constitute a break from meter open to contestation. Nevertheless, the general trends of anomaly that the paper cites should still hold.