

COLERIDGE'S CONCEPTION OF SIN IN "THE ANCIENT MARINER"

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BY

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PREFACE

The bulk and variety of criticism on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" attest to the fact that I am not alone in expressing a dissatisfaction with the critical response over the last hundred years to the poem. The Mariner has been seen variously as a pawn in the cosmic game of Hartleian Necessity by S. F. Gingerich, as a commentator upon the imagination by Robert Penn Warren, as a man in search of an identity who asserts the validity of his existence by Harold Bloom, and as a figure who undergoes an adventure comparable to that of the epic hero by Karl Kroeber. I am attracted most (although certainly not convinced) to these final two approaches, both of which stress an attitude of free will rather than mechanistic behaviour, and which suggest something similar to a Christian existential approach to the poem.

Coleridge's devotion to Hartley and his philosophy of Necessity as detailed in the early letters and poetry is widely known. How firmly and how consistently this devotion was engrained in Coleridge's mind is open to question. In these early years, 1794-1797, Coleridge read in all areas, particularly philosophy, and possessed a quite impressionable mind which could embrace several opposing views at once, and accept and reject ideas in a matter of months. Hartley may have been Coleridge's favourite during these years, but, opposing theories to Necessity, such as those of Milton and Cudworth, cannot be ignored. Likewise, his various lectures of 1795, and even Coleridge's

notes to "Religious Musings," undercut somewhat a Necessitarian approach to "The Ancient Mariner." And, finally, Basil Willey in an article entitled "Coleridge and Religion," warns of Coleridge's "chameleon-habit . . . of adjusting his mental colour to that of his correspondents,"¹ which leads one to question the reliability of many statements in the letters.

I think that a commitment to free will is in evidence in Coleridge's early writings, as well as a commitment to an optimistic benevolence and the desirability of discovering truth. And, I think that these commitments are reflected in "The Ancient Mariner." The narrator possessed of a glittering eye does sin and is punished, but he also goes through a process of self-assertion, of searching for a lost identity, of discovering universal or cosmic truths, that all inject a positive note into his crime. Coleridge's sources for a crime with such positive connotations are many and varied. Chapters I and II deal with philosophic and literary sources respectively. Another most important literary source, Wordsworth's tragedy The Borderers, opens discussion in Chapter III, and a detailed examination of the Mariner's crime follows.

I wish to thank Professor W. J. B. Owen for his assistance in the preparation of my work. I am also indebted to Professor W. U. Ober of the University of Waterloo who encouraged me to pursue my interest

¹Basil Willey, "Coleridge and Religion", in R. L. Brett, ed., S. T. Coleridge (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1971), p. 228.

in Coleridge. And, finally, I wish to express my admiration and appreciation for my wife Kate who, besides working and looking after a demanding two-year-old, also managed with an irritable husband for the greater part of the summer.

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I

THE SEMINAL YEARS 1794-1797

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" virtually demands speculation on its central incident, the slaying of an apparently innocent albatross by an apparently innocent and unmotivated seaman. Considering the events that follow, it is impossible to do anything else but take a moral stance on the slaying and pronounce it a crime, a sinful act of evil. But once this is acknowledged we are still left perplexed: why should the Mariner commit such a crime when every circumstance surrounding him seemingly demands just the opposite, namely friendship with the bird? Before summarizing various speculations on this crime and offering my own, I think it necessary to examine Coleridge's opinions on sin, crime and punishment, and particularly that most notorious of sins, the Fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise, during the years immediately preceding the writing of the "The Ancient Mariner."

i Sin and Optimism

Coleridge's opinions and speculations on sin were gathered from a variety of sources which may be very generally categorized as literary and philosophical. It is this latter source of speculation that I will discuss in this first section, in which I will deal specifically with Hartley, his followers, and Milton.¹

In 1749 David Hartley published his Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations.² In it he developed what was later to be seen as a quite unsubstantial theory of Necessity which controlled human behavior.³ Hartley's theory of association interests us little except that quite early Coleridge declared himself to be a Necessitarian and a disciple of Hartley, apparently incorporating the whole of the Observations into his own philosophic views.⁴

¹I think by Coleridge's time Milton quite legitimately could be called a theological philosopher working in a poetic medium (Paradise Lost) rather than in prose. For that matter many poets could be considered so, but Milton lays more claim to the title than any I can think of.

²David Hartley, Observations on Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations, 1749, 2 Vols. (Facsimile; New York: Garland Publishing, 1971).

³Both Basil Willey in his Eighteenth-Century Background and G. N. G. Orsini in his Coleridge and German Idealism (Carbondale and Edwardsville, U.S.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), devote considerable space to refuting Hartley's mechanistic theories.

⁴Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), I, 137; 11 December 1794. "I am a compleat Necessitarian--and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself."

What does interest us is the question of morality as Hartley details it in Volume II of the Observations.

Hartley subscribes to a theory of optimistic benevolence dependent upon a basic pleasure - pain principle:

our sensible Pleasures are far more numerous than our sensible Pains; and tho' the Pains be, in general, greater than the Pleasures, yet the Sum total of these seems to be greater than that of those; whence the Remainder, after the Destruction of the Pains by the opposite and equal Pleasures, will be pure Pleasure.⁵

Hartley implies that man necessarily seeks pleasure and avoids pain.

After estimating all "Pleasures equally, by their Magnitude, Permanency, and tendency to procure others; and . . . Pains in like manner,"⁶

Hartley concludes that man must practise a virtuous benevolence which

ideally will result in "a Tendency to reduce the State of those who

have eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, back again to a paradisiacal one."⁷ With no hesitation Hartley asserts that such an

associationist theory applies to the "intellectual Pleasures and Pains," as well as to the physical ones.⁸ Hartley assumes the existence of sin

which he calls pain, but refuses to attach a value judgement to such pain.

Man simply experiences physical and intellectual pain which in many cases is related to sin.

What made Hartley, and Priestley and Godwin for that matter,

⁵Hartley, I, 83. The older form of s [ʃ] has been modernized in all cases.

⁶Hartley, I, 83-84.

⁷Hartley, I, 83.

⁸Hartley, I, 83.

appealing to the early Romantics is the optimism he associates with his pleasure - pain theory. Hartley assumes that "a benevolent deity has prearranged the operation of our natures toward ultimate bliss."⁹ Therefore, in the long run, man will pursue pleasure and avoid pain, gradually tending his life toward "a benevolent disposition of God"¹⁰ which equals spiritual bliss. The final state is "perfect Self-annihilation, and the pure Love of God."¹¹ Hartley does not deal directly with the nature of sin in the Observations. But, two implications become evident from his theories: the first, which I have mentioned, is that sin does exist, and the second is that sin works towards man's benefit because of the pain it produces. Man will necessarily try to avoid sin and, hence, tend toward the virtuous life.

Joseph Priestley in his Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity and Essay on the First Principles of Government does discuss the nature of sin in an optimistic context.¹² In the Essay, Priestley states:

In such minds [i.e. those of large comprehension] the ideas of things, that are seen to be the cause and effect of one another, perfectly coalesce into one, and present but one common image. Thus all the ideas of evil absolutely vanish,

⁹J. A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature: The Development of a Concept of Poetry 1791-1819 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 27.

¹⁰Appleyard, p. 25.

¹¹Hartley, II, 282.

¹²Peter Mann in his introduction to Coleridge's Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion does not confirm that Coleridge had read these two works by Priestley, but thinks it "highly probable." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. I: Lectures 1795 On Politics and Religion, ed. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. lxii.

in the idea of the greater good with which it is connected, or of which it is productive.¹³

I will continue quoting Peter Mann:

The "annihilation" or denial of evil is of course purely verbal, and both Priestley and C [Coleridge] fall back upon what could be called in this context the "weak" explanation of evil, namely that it exists but that it ultimately leads to good. . . . "It seems to be the uniform intention of divine providence, to lead mankind to happiness in a progressive, which is the surest, though the slowest method. Evil always leads to good, and imperfect to perfect." . . . ". . . notwithstanding all present unfavourable appearances, whatever is, is right, that even all evils, respecting individuals or societies, any part, or the whole of the human race, will terminate in good"14

Priestley also depends on the assumption that man will naturally desire virtuous pleasure over painful evil. But, and more importantly, in this optimistic view of evil Priestley does not allow for either the man who will justify evil actions by saying that they will necessarily lead to good or the man who can take pleasure in evils, a pleasure that this man can enjoy as others enjoy the practice of virtue. This latter man interested the Romantics exceedingly. Wordsworth's The Borderers, Schiller's The Robbers, and Ann Radcliffe's The Romance of the Forest are only three examples of the study of such a psychology. The former type of man, the optimistic sinner, is known by everyone, and chances are everyone, with an otherwise strong moral sense, has gone through similar reasoning in order to justify some act that is morally bad. Such actions of evil also interested the Romantics, most notably M. G. Lewis

¹³Joseph Priestley, An Essay on the First Principles of Government (1768), p. 3; quoted in Lectures 1795, p. 106n. The explanation in square brackets is supplied by Peter Mann.

¹⁴Lectures 1795, p. 106n. The first passage within this quotation is from An Essay, p. 139; the second from Joseph Priestley, The Theological and Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Priestley, ed. J. T. Rutt (25 vols, 1817-31), Vol. III: Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity, p. 507.

in The Monk, William Godwin in Caleb Williams, and also Coleridge.¹⁵

William Godwin also preached a theory of Necessity but from an atheistic viewpoint. Man necessarily desires to benefit himself. Such self-benefit should also benefit society, for only then will the individual receive a complete benefit from the whole of society. Evil, particularly social evil, results from man benefitting himself at the expense of the rest of society. Godwin's solution to this evil, which, incidentally, Coleridge was opposed to only because it is set in such an unmoral setting, is for each man to "teach and practise universal benevolence and justice."¹⁶ "Let truth be incessantly studied, illustrated, and propagated, and the effect is inevitable."¹⁷ Basil Willey mentions that "one of Godwin's most firmly held convictions was . . . that Truth must prevail, and Virtue be triumphant."¹⁸ Although Coleridge had rejected Godwinism by 1795, particularly his atheism and the above view of evil, Peter Mann quite correctly points out that Coleridge retained many of Godwin's essential ideas: "His allegiance to Priestley made possible his rejection of Godwinism as a philosophy, with far-reaching effects upon his beliefs and actions. Some of the leading

¹⁵As I hope to show, "The Ancient Mariner" deals with such a man, but, bearing more directly on such reasoning is a statement out of a letter to George Coleridge written on 10 March 1798, where Coleridge speaks of evil resulting from "the passions . . . turning the Reason into an hired Advocate." (Letters, I, 398.) Coleridge is obviously referring to specious justifications of evil, such as the perverse use of Priestley's optimistic theory.

¹⁶Basil Willey, The Eighteenth-Century Background. Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), p. 212.

¹⁷William Godwin, An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice And Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness, Book IV, Ch.2 (Vol.I, 223); quoted in Eighteenth-Century Background, p. 210.

¹⁸Eighteenth-Century Background, p. 216.

ideas in Political Justice that Coleridge found most attractive were also to be found in Priestley's philosophy and consequently in a form more congenial to his Christian and moral principles."¹⁹ The idea of continually pursuing and broadcasting the truth is certainly congenial to Coleridge. His motto to The Watchman, published in 1796, proclaims just that idea: "THAT ALL MAY KNOW THE TRUTH;/AND THAT THE TRUTH MAY MAKE US FREE!"²⁰ "THE TRUTH" of course includes the true nature of evil.

Both Hartley's and Priestley's theories are riddled with logical fallacies and dangerous assumptions, as Coleridge increasingly noticed during the period 1795 to 1801; but, for a young man of twenty-three in 1795 they offered a comprehensive theory of human life which agreed with Coleridge's innate benevolent outlook. Typically, Coleridge's reaction is strong. He embraced these theories completely upon initial examination and did not hesitate to say so. One of his earliest major poems, "Religious Musings," upon which Coleridge thought rested all his "poetical credit,"²¹ praises both Hartley and Priestley. Echoing passages in the Observations, Coleridge sums up Hartley's main argument:

From Hope and stronger Faith to perfect Love
Attracted and absorbed: and centered these
God only to behold, and know, and feel,
Till by exclusive consciousness of God
All self-annihilated it shall make.

¹⁹Lectures 1795, introduction by Peter Mann, p. lxiii.

²⁰Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. II: The Watchman, ed. Lewis Patton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 9.

²¹Letters, I, 197.

Coleridge adds a footnote to these lines in the 1797 edition, "See this demonstrated by Hartley."²²

In the same poem Coleridge praises both Hartley and Priestley in a sweeping tribute:

and he of mortal kind

Wisest, he [David Hartley, Coleridge's note, 1796] first
 who marked the ideal tribes
 Down the fine fibres from the sentient brain
 Roll subtly-surgings. Pressing on his steps
 Lo! PRIESTLEY there, Patriot, and Saint, and Sage
 Whom that my fleshly eye hath never seen
 A childish pang of impotent regret
 Hath thrill'd my heart. Him from his native land
 Statesmen blood-stained and priests idolatrous
 By dark lies maddening the blind multitude
 Drove with vain hate. Calm, pitying he retired,
 And mused expectant on these promised years. (ll. 368-376)²³

In many letters from 1794 to 1797, Coleridge claims to be a disciple of Hartley and a "complete Necessitarian."²⁴ Such devotion prompted Coleridge to adopt many of Hartley's and Priestley's ideas wholeheartedly. Hartley's and Priestley's theories on sin are adhered to for the most part, and, considering Coleridge's interest in sin at this time (he projected writing an epic poem on the Origin of Evil),²⁵ they are not elaborated upon to any great extent. But Coleridge does diverge from his sources in a few instances, divergences which throw some light

²²Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Coleridge Poetical Works, ed. E. H. Coleridge (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), ll. 39-43, footnote, p. 110. All quotations from Coleridge's poetry are from this edition and will be acknowledged in the text. Wherever possible the earliest edition of the poem [s] will be used.

²³The line numbers are from the 1834 edition of "Religious Musings." I have reconstructed the 1796 version which disrupts line sequence.

²⁴See also Letters, I, pp. 145, 205, 213.

²⁵Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Kathleen Coburn, Vol. I: 1794-1804 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), Entry 161.

on the strength of Coleridge's Necessitarian beliefs.

The earliest discussion of sin occurs in his Lectures on Revealed Religion of 1795. Using Hartley's pleasure - pain apparatus, Coleridge states that "the greatest possible Evil is Moral Evil," and that "there is not one Pain but which is somehow or other the effect of moral Evil."²⁶ The conclusion of this argument is obvious: "through all Nature that Pain is intended as a stimulus to Man in order that he may remove moral Evil."²⁷ And a most interesting corollary precedes this sentence: "Those Pains therefore that rouse us to the removal of it [moral Evil] become Good."²⁸ It is difficult to ascertain exactly what Coleridge means by this statement. Does it happen by accident [i.e. Necessity] that these pains can be looked upon as good, although the goodness only arises out of the operation of moral evil? Or is Coleridge saying that since these pains are good man can legitimately pursue or activate such pains in order to scourge himself of moral evil since the end result will be a step forward to a state of perfectibility? Such pursuit or activation will involve sin, of course, because it is sin which causes pain.

Coleridge has not protected himself from the trap to which most deterministic philosophies are subject, especially Priestley's.

²⁶Lectures 1795, pp. 106-107.

²⁷Lectures 1795, p. 106

²⁸Lectures 1795, p. 106.

Priestley attempts, quite unsuccessfully, to extricate himself from a reading such as I have just made by admitting, for a completely unknown reason, that all men are "'imperfect necessarians'," "except for rare moments in the seasons of retirement and meditations."²⁹

Priestley's recourse is the orthodox doctrine of God's mercy which works for the benefit of those who sin and who for some reason or other do not treat the sin as a necessary step towards benevolence. Coleridge would not argue with the intercession of God's mercy.³⁰

But how he could accept such an illogical idea as an "imperfect necessarian" is without reason. The paradox is too obvious to explain and only shows glaringly the weaknesses of a Necessitarian philosophy. Coleridge's continuation of the above argument on evil only leaves him more vulnerable to such criticism: "It was . . . necessary that Man should run through the Course of Vice & Mischief since by Experience alone his Virtue & Happiness can acquire Permanence & Security."³¹

Finally, Coleridge uses some obscure Hartleian arithmetic to state confidently that "the Sum of Happiness is twice as great to a Being who has arrived at a certain point by gradual progressiveness as it would be to him who was placed there in the first step of his Existence."³² Coleridge's optimism is as exuberant, if not more so,

²⁹Joseph Priestley, Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity Illustrated (Birmingham, 1782), pp. 142-164; quoted in Robert Penn Warren, "A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading", in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Rime of The Ancient Mariner (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1946), p. 130n.

³⁰This will be discussed in the next section, see below pp. 20-21.

³¹Lectures 1795, p. 108.

³²Lectures 1795, p. 109.

as Hartley's or Priestley's. In 1795 he could see no contradictions in his own thought or that of his masters. He writes to Robert Southey in August 1795: "That Being, who is 'in will, in deed, Impulse of all to all' whichever be your determination, will make it ultimately the best —,"³³ and in November 1795: "However wickedly you might act, God would make it ULTIMATELY the best—."³⁴ Such optimism never entirely deserted Coleridge, while his sources during these early years were eventually rejected. But, because of the contradictions in these sources, Coleridge could only transcribe most of them into his early work.

Similar ideas, with a few variations, appear in the best of the early poetry, particularly "Religious Musings," composed from 1794 to 1796 and published in this latter year.

Thus from the Elect, regenerate through faith,
 Pass the dark Passions and what thirsty cares
 Drink up the spirit, and the dim regards
 Self-centre. Lo they vanish! or acquire
 New names, new features—by supernal grace
 Enrobed with Light, and naturalised in Heaven. (ll. 88-93)

and:

Lord of unsleeping Love,
 From everlasting Thou! We shall not die.
 These, even these [examples of political evil], in
 mercy didst thou form,
 Teachers of Good through Evil, by brief wrong
 Making Truth lovely, and her future might
 Magnetic o'er the fixed untrembling heart. (ll. 192-197)

³³Letters, I, 159. [Early August 1795].

³⁴Letters, I, 168. [13] November 1795.

Coleridge added notes to each of these passages in the 1797 publication of the poem: to the first,

Our evil Passions, under the influence of Religion, become innocent, and may be made to animate our virtue---;

and to the second,

In this paragraph the Author recalls himself from his indignation against the instruments of Evil, to contemplate the uses of these Evils in the great process of divine Benevolence. In the first age, Men were innocent from ignorance of Vice; they fell, that by the knowledge of consequences they might attain intellectual security, i.e. Virtue, which is a wise and strong-nerv'd Innocence.³⁵

In the first note Coleridge seems to accept blindly Priestley's optimistic argument that evil can be looked upon as essentially good because of the end result--a perfect man. Curiously, he adds a statement which is not particularly Necessitarian: these evil passions "may be made to animate our virtue." In his Eighteenth-Century Background, Basil Willey points out this same contradiction in Hartley: "His confusion is highly characteristic of the materialist position in the eighteenth century, in which man appears simultaneously as the product and the changer of circumstances, though there is no theoretic acceptance of this paradox."³⁶ Coleridge appears to go somewhat further than Hartley and implies that man can consciously use his evil Passions in some manner to animate his virtue. Willey points out that Hartley seems to "reintroduce free-will" into his argument after dismissing it as non-existent on the human level of progress. Coleridge seems to do much the same thing while still proclaiming a completely Necessitarian

³⁵Works (1969), pp. 112n, 116n.

³⁶Eighteenth-Century Background, p. 149.

approach to life.³⁷ What is interesting in this note and in a passage from the Lecture on Religion of 1795 already quoted, "It was . . . necessary that Man should run through the Course of Vice & Mischief . . .,"³⁸ is the fact that Coleridge refused to condemn sin. Sin exists and no philosophy can will it away. Coleridge recognized this most obvious fact, and because of his optimistic views on life and man, he apparently saw sin as beneficial, something that man could not do without, something that was contingent upon his future happiness. In fact, Coleridge is on the verge of slipping into those very arguments Priestley tried to defend against. In a Notebook entry, which Kathleen Coburn does not date but apparently was entered in 1796, Coleridge writes:

A State of Compulsion, even tho that Complusion be directed by perfect Wisdom, keeps Mankind stationary—for whenever it is withdrawn, after a lapse of ages, they have yet to try evil in order to know whether or no it be not good.³⁹

The note has many important implications which will be discussed later. At the moment we need only take note of the last two lines; Coleridge seems to be condoning sin.

An argument strikingly similar to the one above, but with one major addition, namely the introduction of free will, appears in John Milton's Areopagitica. It is not difficult to gather from Coleridge's prose works and letters of the 1790's that John Milton occupied first place among English poets. In a lecture of 1795 entitled The Plot

³⁷A discussion of Coleridge and free will occupies the third section of this chapter; see below, pp. 27-44.

³⁸See above, p. 10.

³⁹Notebooks, I, Entry 150.

Discovered, Coleridge refers to Milton as a sage and patriot, whose spirit still wanders through his native country "giving wisdom and inspiring zeal!"⁴⁰ In a letter to John Thelwall dated 17 December 1796, Coleridge praises Milton above all other writers:

Is not Milton a sublimier poet than Homer or Virgil? Are not his Personages more sublimely cloathed? And do you not know, that there is not perhaps one page in Milton's Paradise Lost, in which he has not borrowed his imagery from the Scriptures?⁴¹

Coleridge continues, saying that Milton measures up very poorly to the Bible, but he is more successful than any other writer. I have noted that Milton was both poet and theological philosopher. I think it likely that Coleridge would be as influenced by Milton as he would by Hartley and Priestley.

Returning to the Areopagitica, I think it vital for an understanding of Coleridge's ideas on the nature of evil, to quote at length:

Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is . . . involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and in . . . many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned. . . . It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil; that is to say, of knowing good by evil.

As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear, without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her

⁴⁰Lectures 1795, pp. 290-291.

⁴¹Letters, I, 281.

adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary.⁴²

The passage needs little comment. The argument is similar to that of Coleridge's but for two exceptions: first, Milton sees the confrontation with sin in terms of free will while Coleridge sees it as inevitably necessary. Milton does not advocate a pursuit of vice or a condoning of vice; but, since man is doomed to know evil, that is sin, the possibility and desirability of using a given condition of life positively seems to be the best method of promoting virtue. Milton, an optimist himself, does not fall into the trap of condoning sin, simply because of his assumption of the existence of free will. He specifically states that man ought to exercise his virtue and abstain from sin; but in order to abstain from something man must know what that something is. And, since it is man's condition to know sin first hand, he should take advantage of this knowledge. Secondly, Coleridge's optimism causes him to treat sin more unrealistically. He stresses the positive results of knowing evil rather than the positive benefits accruing from a confrontation between virtue and vice. I do not think that Coleridge would deny the value of the confrontation, but within his optimistic framework, virtue inevitably takes an increasing hold over man and therefore it need not be dealt with; to explain the existence of sin is another matter entirely.

⁴² John Milton, Areopagitica, in The Student's Milton, ed. F. A. Patterson (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1961), p. 738. This quotation first appears in Coleridge's writings in The Friend, No. 4, 7 September 1809. (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. IV: The Friend, ed. Barbara E.

Returning to "Religious Musings": the second footnote to the above passage in the poem introduces another conflict in Coleridge's thought. As a follower of Hartley and Priestley, Coleridge must look upon all evil as an ultimate form of good, but he tells us the difficulty he has adhering to such a position. The twenty lines preceding the quotation deal with what Coleridge thought were the more serious examples of social and religious evil. That he treats them with indignation understates the lines somewhat. The fact that he would leave these lines in the poem in the second edition of 1797, and then comment on this digression from his argument, suggests that perhaps Coleridge had not completely reconciled himself to the existence of evil in a Hartleian sense. The lack of evidence of a marked progress in man's virtue in 1797 would tend to overwhelm the strongest optimistic arguments; and, apparently, Coleridge was subject to such factors which rent his philosophical fabric. Peter Mann makes a very accurate observation in his introduction to the Lectures on Revealed Religion of 1795, which he thinks "reflect in a more acute form the difficulty of holding simultaneously the theological view that all evil is ultimately an obscure good and the view that social and moral evils are dependent upon circumstances and are consequently remediable."⁴³ Coleridge's "circumstances" appear to be outside the infinite power of God, and, hence,

Rooke (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) I, 79-80.) It is highly unlikely that Coleridge would not have been familiar with Areopagitica considering his familiarity with Paradise Lost. Describing himself as a "library-cormorant" in 1796 (Letters, I, 260), Coleridge undoubtedly would have pursued his interest in Milton to the extent of reading everything available, and Areopagitica would have been readily available.

⁴³Lectures 1795, p. lxiii.

not subject to optimistic laws of Necessity. It seems reasonable to state that such a conflict is one of the bases upon which Coleridge eventually rejected Necessity and is a factor he would be questioning consciously in 1797-1798.

ii Crime and Punishment

In the lectures of 1795, Coleridge talks at length about social punishment, always from the point of view of it being unjust. Because of poor education and "bad" government man is led into crime and guilt, and, consequently, is punished for the crime by the very agent that caused it. Only in the first of the Lectures on Revealed Religion does he mention crime and punishment on a universal, or not specifically social level, and the results are typically Hartleian:

So virtue is first practiced for the pleasures that accompany or the rewards that follow it--and Vice avoided as hateful from the punishment attache[d].⁴⁴

Instead of using Hartley's vague term "Pain," Coleridge employs the traditional word "punishment." Despite his view on social punishment, and his virtual condonation of sin, Coleridge thinks that vice should be followed by punishment. He makes no mention of what form this punishment takes, but we can assume it takes the customary form of mental and physical agony in some degree.

Only in Osorio, Coleridge's contribution to Gothic drama written in 1797, does he deal with sin and punishment at any length. In the play, which Coleridge admits was very poorly executed,⁴⁵ Osorio

⁴⁴Lectures 1795, pp. 113-114.

⁴⁵"In this sketch of a tragedy, all is imperfect, and much obscure." Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol. II: Dramatic Works and Appendices (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 1114.

attempts to dispose of his brother, Albert, and marry Maria, Albert's fiancée. In the process Osorio kills Ferdinand, a man who was supposed to kill Albert, incensing the wrath of the Moorish community. Subsequently, Osorio and his family are threatened with death by Ferdinand's wife Alhadra and her band of Moors. Essentially, the play contrasts a Christian view of mercy (Albert forgives Osorio and trusts he will mend his ways) with the Old Testament creed of vengeance (Alhadra demands the death of Osorio, and his father, brother and Maria). Suprisingly, the result is only partially Hartleian or Priestleian. Alhadra, under the influence of his benevolent nature and Maria's entreaties, spares Albert, Velez and Maria; but Osorio, who appears to be truly penitent, is hauled off stage to what must be death in one version, and is murdered by Alhadra in another version which E. H. Coleridge does not date, but which is probably post-1797.⁴⁶

Again we can see a conflict in Coleridge's thought in those three years preceding the writing of "The Ancient Mariner." If the play was to be a slavish following of Hartley's benevolent Necessity, one would expect the repentant Osorio to be saved and the three major figures, Albert, Osorio and Alhadra, to be well on their way toward a benevolent way of life. Coleridge presents just this possibility in the final speeches of Osorio and Alhadra. Osorio acknowledges his crime and longs for punishment:

⁴⁶Osorio, in Dramatic Works, p. 596. All future quotations will be acknowledged in the text.

O woman! [Alhadra]
 I have stood silent like a slave before thee,
 That I might taste the wormwood and the gall,
 And satiate this self-accusing spirit
 With bitterer agonies than death can give. (V, 302-306)

But, he is dragged out to certain death. Alhadra then follows with the final speech in the play:

I thank thee, Heaven! Thou hast ordain'd it wisely,
 That still extremes bring their own cure. That point
 In misery which makes the oppressed man
 Regardless of his own life, makes him too
 Lord of the oppressor's! (V, 307-311)

Such sentiments should come from one who recognizes the possibility of regeneration in her victim and has forgiven him. But, the speech is delivered as Osorio is being executed. The Hartleian strain of Necessity is unmistakable in the first lines, but, the simple fact that Osorio must be killed because he is a murderer, despite his repentance, introduces a conflict similar to ones we have already seen. Coleridge is attracted to Hartley's ideal optimism but a traditional orthodox strain, the strain of sin and punishment, of free will, of social and moral evil having little connection with ultimate good, produces conflicts, at least in his writing, and more than likely in his mind.

Coleridge's closing statement on his discussion of evil in the first of the Lectures on Revealed Religion will perhaps shed more light on what seems to be a contradiction:

There is a state of depravity from which it seems impossible to recall mankind except by impressing on them worthy notions of Supreme Being, and other hopes and other fears than what visible objects supply. But unsusceptible of the effects of Reasoning Understanding so depraved will yield only to the overwhelming of supernatural Intervention."⁴⁷

⁴⁷Lectures 1795, p. 111.

This statement seems to reflect Priestley's lame "imperfect necessarian" compromise. Punishment in some cases will not affect depravity; therefore, only Divine revelation can maintain a system of ultimate benevolence. One problem remains; Coleridge does not mention why some individuals are immune to punishment and, hence, the basic laws of Necessity. If we ignore this factor for the moment, Coleridge's reconciliation of earthly punishment with ultimate divine mercy is again echoed by a more orthodox source, namely Milton's Paradise Lost.⁴⁸

In a fragmentary lecture of 1795, Coleridge asserts that we definitely have some knowledge of Divine mercy which can affect all men. We do not know for sure that there is such a thing as Everlasting Torment or Eternal Punishment, and therefore to state that it does exist is nonsense. But the simple fact that we do not know for certain of its existence should prompt sinful men to act virtuously; for "they who rely on unrevealed Mercies as encouragements to continue in Sin are the least likely to be the subject of the same."⁴⁹ Coleridge does not deny the possibility of eternal punishment, but, as with Milton, he favours the benevolent idea of God's mercy and grace being extended to all. In Book XII of Paradise Lost Michael reveals to Adam that Christ shall enter heaven in order to

⁴⁸C. S. Lewis in his A Preface to "Paradise Lost" (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 66, mentions that Milton follows quite closely St. Augustine's discussion of the Fall and subsequent redemption which provides a basis for Western Christian doctrine.

⁴⁹Lectures 1795, pp. 341-343.

judge th' unfaithful dead, but to reward
 His faithful, and receive them into bliss,
 Whether in Heav'n or Earth, for then the Earth
 Shall all be Paradise, far happier place
 Then this of Eden, and far happier daies.⁵⁰

Milton accepts the idea of justice being pronounced upon those who have rejected elements of the Christian faith, and Coleridge leaves himself open for such a possibility. That he does, seems to suggest a more stable position on Coleridge's part in connection with crime and punishment. The possibility of divine justice, that is punishment for crime, justifies the existence of temporal punishment and the condoning of temporal punishment. Only through temporal punishment can man be prepared to receive God's mercy. Although crime or sin may lead to ultimate good, such sin cannot be condoned despite the eventual benefits that accrue from it. M. M. Mahood makes the point that Milton thinks similarly about Adam's sin: "Milton, then, believes in a Fortunate Fall; which is something quite different from believing the Fall to be a commendable act."⁵¹

On a universal level, Coleridge seems to have been interested in two specific crimes, the Fall of Adam and Eve, and what he calls Idolatry. Immediately after his discussion of sin in the first Lecture on Revealed Religion, Coleridge launches into a history of Christianity, beginning with the Mosaic dispensation. Only one detail of this discussion concerns us here, namely the place given to superstition

⁵⁰ John Milton, Paradise Lost, in The Student's Milton, XII, 461-465. All future quotations will be acknowledged in the text.

⁵¹ M. M. Mahood, "Milton's Heroes", in Alan Rudrum, ed., Milton. Modern Judgements (London: MacMillan, 1968), p. 265.

or idolatry. Giving a short preview of what his next lecture will be concerned with, Coleridge writes:

In order to take a fair survey of the Mosaic Dispensation we should consider its great Design---The preserving one people free from Idolatry in order that they might [be] a safe Receptacle of the necessary precursive Evidences of Christianity!"⁵²

Coleridge defines one aspect of Idolatry in his second lecture:

One of the chief and most influencing Principle[s] of Idolatry was a Persuasion that the temporal Blessings of Life, Health, Length of Days, fruitful Seasons, Victory in Wars, and such advantages were to be expected and sought for as the Gifts of some inferior and subordinate Beings, who were supposed to be the Guardians of Mortal men."⁵³

Peter Mann footnotes Coleridge's source for this sentence: Moses

Lowman, A Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews, who completes Coleridge's argument:

'Thus Men came not only to lose the true Knowledge of the one, only God, and of his immediate Providence, and that all these Blessings could therefore come from him alone, who was best pleased and best worshipped by Virtue, Goodness, Righteousness and true Holiness; but they became necessarily vicious and corrupt in Practice, as well as Principle.'⁵⁴

Coleridge could conceive of no greater evil than the denial of God, since he thought it usually tended towards a lack of morality. His vehement rejection of Godwin, detailed in his letters and in The Watchman, occurred for precisely this reason. And, in a letter to John Thelwall dated 17 December 1796, we see Coleridge using every argument

⁵²Lectures 1795, p. 116.

⁵³Lectures 1795, pp. 140-141.

⁵⁴Moses Lowman, A Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews (1740), in Lectures 1795, p. 141n..

in his power to remove the contempt a young atheist feels for the Christian Religion.⁵⁵ In this same letter, writing of Christian morality, Coleridge links superstition with evil:

It [Christian morality] preaches Repentance---what repentance? Tears, & Sorrow, & a repetition of the same crimes?---No. A 'Repentance unto good works'---a repentance that completely does away all superstitious terrors by teaching, that the Past is nothing in itself; that if the Mind is good, that it was bad, imports nothing.⁵⁶

Coleridge does not elaborate upon "superstitious terrors," but they are obviously connected with punishment, in this case eternal punishment of the worst of crimes, a renouncing of God and Christian or Godly morality. In a later letter to John Prior Estlin dated 7 December 1802, Coleridge states emphatically that "The tendency to Idolatry seems to me to lie at the root of all our human Vices---it is our Original Sin."⁵⁷ The Fall of Adam and Eve, among other things, was a denial of the infinite wisdom of God.⁵⁸

This same idea appears in "Religious Musings." I will quote at length:

⁵⁵Letters, I, 279-285.

⁵⁶Letters, I, 282.

⁵⁷Letters, II, 893.

⁵⁸Warren cites a passage from Priestley's Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity, which says that man idolizes himself and his world. He considers "'other things as proper agents and causes; whereas, strictly speaking, there is but one cause, but one sole agent in universal nature. Thus . . . all vice is reducible to idolatry . . .'" Doctrine, pp. 142-164; quoted in Warren, p. 130n.

But 'tis God

Diffused through all, that doth make all one whole;
 This the worst superstition, him except
 Aught to desire, Supreme Reality!
 The plenitude and permanence of bliss!
 O Fiends of SUPERSTITION! not that oft
 Your pitiless rites have floated with man's blood
 The skull-pil'd Temple ["Your grisly idols," 1797],
 not for this shall wrath
 Thunder against you from the Holy One!
 But (whether ye th' unclimbing Bigot mock
 With secondary Gods, or if more pleas'd
 Ye petrify th' imbrothell'd atheist's heart,
 The Atheist your worst slave) I o'er some plain
 Peopled with Death, and to the silent Sun
 Steaming with tyrant-murder'd multitudes;
 Or where mid groans and shrieks loud-laughing TRADE
 More hideous packs his bales of living anguish;
 I will raise up a mourning, O ye Fiends!
 And curse your spells, that film the eye of Faith,
 Hiding the present God; whose presence lost,
 The moral world's cohesion, we become
 An Anarchy of Spirits! Toy--bewitched,
 Made blind by lusts, disherited of soul,
 No common centre Man, no common sire
 Knoweth!

(ll. 130-149)

Coleridge's exuberant lines speak for themselves. Idolatry is undoubtedly the chiefest of sins.

Osorio commits just this sin. He has set himself up as an idol, as a cause and sole agent, just as his more successful prototype, Francis, in Schiller's The Robbers, does. Osorio's actions are definitely anarchistic, and the cause is a rejection of a universal morality, "the moral world's cohesion," which is dependent upon God. Coleridge calls him "A man who is in truth a weak man, yet always duping himself into the belief that he has a soul of iron."⁵⁹ Coleridge

⁵⁹Dramatic Works, p. 1114.

leaves the cause of Osorio's guilt, or at least the conditions under which he sinned, open to question. Such conditions are, I think, linked to Coleridge's other interest in sin, namely the crime committed by Adam and Eve.

Coleridge did not undertake any formal criticism of Milton until the lectures of 1811; but there is no doubt that he was thoroughly acquainted with Milton's works prior to 1797. It is difficult to speculate on how Coleridge would read Milton, but a note in Coleridge's hand in William Hayley's Life of Milton, does furnish us with a clue, especially for Paradise Lost. Shedd, in his 1853 edition of Coleridge's Complete Works, reproduces this note, dating it 1807 for no apparent reason. Hayley's work was published in 1794, and since the copy was in Thomas Poole's possession, there may be reason to believe Coleridge had read the work and commented on it before 1807. In one of the notes Coleridge leaves what appears to be a direct reference to Hartley: "We are the creatures of association."⁶⁰ Such a statement certainly would not slip out after 1801, considering his vehement rejection of Hartley's association theories.⁶¹ These notes contain nothing besides this sentence that would give us any indication of how Coleridge read Paradise Lost, but apparently he did read it with Hartley in mind. I think such a reading would not be too far removed from a twentieth-century Fortunate Fall reading of Paradise Lost,

⁶⁰ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Professor Shedd, Vol. IV: Notes and Lectures upon Shakspeare, and Some of the Old Poets and Dramatists, ed. Mrs. H. N. Coleridge (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853), p. 306.

⁶¹ "I . . . have overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley." Letters, II, 706. This is not to say that Coleridge rejected the association of ideas outright. In Biographia

and, therefore, it would be valuable to pursue such a reading and perhaps gain more insight into Coleridge's thoughts on crime and punishment as it relates to Original Sin.

The following reading of Paradise Lost will, of course, be selective and quite Hartleian in nature. The narrator of Paradise Lost, who I will assume is Milton, describes the Garden of Eden quite fully when Satan first enters it. Practically in the middle of the description occur the following lines:

And all amid them [trees] stood the Tree of Life,
High eminent, blooming Ambrosial Fruit
Of vegetable Gold; and next to Life
Our Death the Tree of Knowledge grew fast by,
Knowledge of Good bought dear by knowing ill. (IV, 218-222)

And a similar statement occurs in Book VII in the song by the Heavenly Choir: "his evil [Satan's]/ Thou usest, and from thence creat'st more good." (VII, 615-616) The poem ends with an equally similar statement that is more Hartleian than the preceding two:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!
That all this good of evil shall produce,
And evil turn to good. (XII, 469-471)

That Hartley, Priestley and Coleridge would be in agreement with such sentiments is obvious and need not be gone into again. But of course, this is only half of Milton's philosophy on sin. The other

Literaria, he makes a case for accepting Aristotle's theories of association because, according to Coleridge, they account for free will and the imagination. It is only Hartley's theories of "vibrations and vibratuncles" which are smiled at and not the basic content of Volume II of the Observations, (Biographia Literaria, ed. G. Watson (New York: Dent, 1967), p. 63). If the date of the entry in Hayley is 1807, I imagine that he would be more careful about the use of the term association, especially in such a context, considering his preoccupation with the renouncement of Hartley from 1801 to 1817.

half has to do with free will which Hartley and Priestley would tend to disagree with, though we cannot say with such certainty that Coleridge would disagree. His philosophical fabric is full of contradictions, and we have seen basic instances of his uneasiness with Hartley and Priestley. Considering his conversion from Hartley (as early as 1799⁶²) and certain comments on Milton, we may speculate that Milton precipitated Coleridge's questioning of Necessity and eventual rejection of it. Hartley's motivation behind the Fall, that is Necessity, is completely at odds with Milton's. It is in this area that Coleridge would have to do some rather deep questioning of his philosophy if Milton was to remain pre-eminent.

Coleridge enters a comment in the "Gutch Notebook" (which Kathleen Coburn dates "before 27 February 1797") on how one should approach a reading of Milton:

A Reader of Milton must be always on his Duty: he is surrounded with sense; it rises in every line; every word is to the purpose. There are no lazy intervals: all has been considered and demands & merits observation.

If this be called obscurity, let it be remembered tis such a one as is complaisant to the Reader: not that vicious obscurity, which proceeds from a muddled head etc.⁶³

To read "sense" as meaning Coleridge thought Milton made good sense is overstepping the bounds of interpretation, but, his praise for Milton is unmistakable. What kind of "sense," then, would other passages in Milton, particularly passages that contradict Hartley,

⁶² Letters, I, 482; see below, p. 40.

⁶³ Notebooks, I, Entry 276. This passage is not Coleridge's own, but must have been adhered to by him since it was placed by him in the preface to his 1797 edition of his poems.

Priestley, and Coleridge himself, make to the author of "The Ancient Mariner"?

I will quote five passages, three from Paradise Lost and two from The Christian Doctrine⁶⁴ which adequately summarize Milton's stance on Original Sin and free will. Adam's speech in Book IX is the fullest expression on free will given in Paradise Lost:

O Woman, best are all things as the will
Of God ordaind them, his creating hand
Nothing imperfect or deficient left
Of all that he Created, much less Man,
Or ought that might his happie State secure,
Secure from outward force; within himself
The danger lies, yet lies within his power:
Against his will he can receive no harme.
But God left free the Will, for what obeyes
Reason, is free, and Reason he made right,
But bid her well beware, and still erect,
Least by some faire appeering good surpris'd
She dictate false, and misinforme the Will
To do what God expresly hath forbid.

* * * * *

Firm we subsist, yet possible to swerve,
Since Reason not impossibly may meet
Some specious object by the Foe subornd,
And fall into deception unaware,
Not keeping strictest watch, as she was warnd. (IX, 343-363)

And from Book III, God speaks of free will before the Fall:

I made him [Adam] just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.

* * * * *

What pleasure I from such obedience paid,
When Will and Reason (Reason also is choice)
Useless and vain, of freedom both despoild,

⁶⁴ Coleridge could not have been familiar with The Christian Doctrine, but it is valuable as a comment on Paradise Lost. F. A. Patterson notes that the manuscript was discovered early in the nineteenth-century and not published until 1825.

Made passive both, had servd necessitie,
Not mee.

* * * * *

for so

I formd them free, and free they must remain,
Till they enthrall themselves: I else must change
Thir nature, and revoke the high Decree
Unchangeable, Eternal, which ordain'd
Thir freedom, they themselves ordain'd thir fall.
(III, 98-128)

And in Book XII, the archangel Michael describes to Adam man's
prelapsarian free will:

Since thy original lapse, true Libertie
Is lost, which alwayes with right Reason dwells
Twinn'd, and from her hath no dividual being:
Reason in man obscur'd, or not obeyd,
Immediately inordinate desires
And upstart Passions catch the Government
From Reason, and to servitude reduce
Man till then free. Therefore since hee permits
Within himself unworthie Powers to reign
Over free Reason, God in Judgement just
Subjects him from without to violent Lords;
Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
His outward freedom: Tyrannie must be,
Though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse. (XII, 83-96)

Milton comments on the essential ideas in these three passages in

The Christian Doctrine:

Nor does Scripture intimate anything derogatory to divine providence, even where (as sometimes happens) the names of fortune or chance are not scrupled to be employed; all that is meant is to exclude the idea of human causation. Voluntary actions. In this, however, there is no infringement on the liberty of the human will; otherwise man would be deprived of the power of free agency, not only with regard to what is right, but with regard to what is indifferent, or even positively wrong.⁶⁵

Before commenting on this seemingly Hartleian statement, I will quote one more passage:

⁶⁵ John Milton, The Christian Doctrine, trans. Bishop Sumner, in The Student's Milton, p. 981.

It cannot be denied, however, that some remnants of the divine image still exist in us, not wholly extinguished by this spiritual death [the Fall]. . . . These vestiges of original excellence are visible, first, in the understanding. . . . Nor . . . is the liberty of the will entirely destroyed. First, with regard to things indifferent, whether natural or civil. Secondly, the will is clearly not altogether inefficient in respect of good works, or at any rate of good endeavors.⁶⁶

By accepting the existence of free will, Milton's thought on sin is much more cohesive and logical than either Hartley's or Priestley's. Neither of these two philosophers avoids contradictions and both are compelled to allow for free will to some extent while attempting to remain inside the limits of Necessity. Priestley's rather lame "imperfect necessarian" explanation needs no more explanation.

Hartley attempts a more sophisticated reconciliation by distinguishing between philosophical free will which he says does not exist, and individual free will which does operate. Appleyard gives a concise summary of the two types of free will:

he [Hartley] denies free will in the philosophical sense (if either A or a [A's contrary] could equally follow is the same as "affirming that one or both of them might start up into being without any cause"), he admits it in the practical order ("if free will be defined as the power of doing what a person desires or wills to do," then it is consistent with the doctrine of mechanism since a person's desires and affections are developed by the association of ideas).⁶⁷

Speaking more fully on free will, Hartley goes on to say: "To give a Being a Power of making itself miserable, if this Being use that Power, is just the same thing, in him who has infinite Power and

⁶⁶The Christian Doctrine, pp. 999-1000.

⁶⁷Appleyard, p. 25. The two quotations are from Hartley, I, 503, 501.

Knowledge, as directly making him miserable."⁶⁸ The argument generally sounds Miltonian, except that Hartley ignores the possibility of choice (which Milton does not do), and, effectively, takes away man's free will. All actions, which Hartley is willing to concede may be called actions of free will, ultimately are authorized by Necessity or the benevolent will of an infinite God. Man has no choice but to choose evil or good, and whichever he chooses is willed by God and works toward ultimate happiness.

Milton's free will is quite different. Neither God nor his creatures are slaves to a Necessity that He may have pre-ordained. Man can choose between evil and good in perfect freedom. Once the choice is made the nature of the crime and punishment may be dependent on God's will. Knowing evil and good, man is in a position to choose. He does not create evil but partakes of something already existent. It is not by chance that he partakes of the evil, but, because the evil is either a temptation or a punishment. Also, Milton's optimism only applies to those who believe in God and endeavour to pursue virtue. Those who freely choose evil and reject God's mercy are excluded from His grace. Thus, evil operates only for the benefit of the virtuous. Milton's benevolent optimism does not embrace all mankind. Enthralldom to the passions, and, hence, loss of freedom, does not contradict free will. It was man's will that produced such enthralldom, and, as Milton says in The Christian Doctrine, man still possesses "vestiges of original excellence" which will

⁶⁸Hartley, II, 64.

permit him to pursue virtue.

How favourably, then, would Coleridge react to such views on free will? We have seen how the typically Romantic notion of actively pursuing sin occupied him. The end result of such sin is, of course, good, but the idea involves the freedom of man's will to pursue consciously the contrary of what Necessity would demand of him. We have seen the dilemma he found himself in concerning social evils and the ideals of philosophy. Milton explains this problem in quite satisfactory terms, terms that reconcile Coleridge's innate optimism and his desire for justice on a social level, while Hartley and Priestley try to ignore present evils in favour of their optimistic doctrine. In his letter to Thelwall, Coleridge, by implication, assumes that Thelwall has exercised his free will in order to arrive at his amoral atheistic position. And, Coleridge assumes that Thelwall can just as freely embrace a Christian morality without acknowledging Christianity.

In "The Destiny of Nations," Coleridge writes two rather cryptic lines which fail to agree with Hartley:

For what is Freedom, but the unfettered use
Of all the powers which God for use had given?⁶⁹

That the power of choice is included in this "Freedom" is not denied by Coleridge, and may, I think, be considered to exist, at least within these two lines. In a Notebook entry, Coleridge lashes out at Godwin in ambiguous terms:

⁶⁹Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Destiny of Nations", in Works (1969), ll. 13-14.

to introduce a dissection of Atheism--particularly the Godwinian System of Pride Proud of what? An outcast of blind Nature ruled by a fatal Necessity--Slave of an idiot Nature!⁷⁰

G. N. G. Orsini interprets this note as evidence that Coleridge was attacking Godwin's denial of free will.⁷¹ This is a possible interpretation, although I think it more likely that Coleridge was questioning free will and the lack of a divine instigator of Necessity.⁷²

Concerning crime and punishment, Coleridge could not restrict himself to the notion of pain. To him, sin automatically involved punishment--punishment as a deterrent, not simply as a well-placed instance of pain that would push man towards virtuous behaviour. And, in the extreme case, Hartley's pleasure - pain system failed Coleridge again; for he found it necessary to allow for complete depravity, to allow for those men who respond to pain as if it were pleasure. Only God's mercy and grace through the medium of supernatural intervention can reclaim these souls. And even then, Coleridge is not absolutely sure that they will be reclaimed. He argues for redemption of all men, but, at the same time, cannot dismiss the possibility of eternal punishment for some.

⁷⁰Notebooks, I, Entry 174. Kathleen Coburn dates this entry from December 1795 to January 1796.

⁷¹Orsini, p. 34.

⁷²Speaking of these early years, Robert Shafer comments that Coleridge, by himself, arrived at a point similar to that of Kant and Hume: "the moral responsibility of the individual, which meant the free, originative, in a sense creative, will of the individual, seemed an ultimate postulate, to deny which was equivalent to the denial of human nature itself--equivalent in short to suicide." Christianity and Naturalism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), pp. 43-44.

And, finally, in connection with both free will and crime and punishment, Coleridge's own life and his awareness of his failings would, I think, cause him to look upon Milton in a favourable light.

T. McFarland comments on Coleridge's life in a short "Excursus note" entitled "Existential Shipwreck in Coleridge's Thought and Life":

It was a sense of repeated defeat (his failure to take a degree at Cambridge, his unhappy marriage, his opium addiction as early as 1796, his disappointments in friendship, the attacks of reviewers) and the omnipresent and mysterious inability to work steadily and justify his genius—in short, the shipwreck of his life—that seems to have led Coleridge to the mystery of sin and fallenness on the one hand, and paradoxically, to his conviction of the utter uniqueness of the individual self on the other. . . . In this massive complex of experience, therefore, we find the groundwork of Coleridge's profound religiousness, and the evidence for his conviction that "the doctrine of Original Sin gives to all the other mysteries of religion a common basis, a connection of dependency, an intelligibility of relation, and a total harmony, which supersedes proof."⁷³

McFarland dates the shipwreck from 1794, and cites a passage from a letter to Southey dated 9 December 1794, to demonstrate Coleridge's self-appraisal: "My very Virtues are of the slothful order."⁷⁴ Of course, the shipwreck did not occur until at least 1800, but, I think, the events of 1794 to 1797 would cause Coleridge to question seriously every idea, external or internal, that occurred in his mind in order to link them with what he calls the "vast" or the whole.

In one of the famous autobiographical letters, Coleridge tells

⁷³Thomas McFarland, Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 314-316. The quotation is from Coleridge's Aids to Reflection, found in The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Professor Shedd, Vol. I: Aids to Reflection. Statesman's Manual (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853), p. 293.

⁷⁴McFarland, p. 315. The letter is found in Letters, I, 132.

of what can only be considered a non-Hartleian streak that had been engrained in him since childhood:

from my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii, &c &c--my mind had been habituated to the Vast--& I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my sight.⁷⁵

On first reading, Hartley and Priestley looked as if they were concerned with the "Vast," but not the "Vast" as it really was. In a letter written two days before this, Coleridge specifies what is wrong with Hartley:

more frequently all things appear little--all the knowlege, that can be acquired, child's play--the universe itself--what but an immense heap of little things?--I can contemplate nothing but parts, & parts are all little!--My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something great--something one & indivisible.⁷⁶

Within the scope of this dissatisfaction come Hartley and Priestley. Necessity demands that man be a part within a bigger part, namely God who, because He is explained by Hartley, is still "a part." Milton's God and Milton's free will are in certain respects "something great," but the very fact that Milton wrote Paradise Lost reduces such a scheme to parts.

In this lamentation, we can see Coleridge groping towards his later faith in mystery, in an occurrence that cannot be logically reduced because it is at one with the "great," with the "one & indivisible." In Aids to Reflection, Coleridge acknowledges the existence of free will but refuses to speculate on the nature of Original Sin: "It [Original Sin] is a mystery, that is, a fact, which we see, but can

⁷⁵Letters, I, 354. [16 October 1797]

⁷⁶Letters, I, 349. [14 October 1797]

not explain; and the doctrine a truth which we apprehend, but can neither comprehend nor communicate."⁷⁷ In 1797, Coleridge was not as willing to accede to the existence of the mystery itself. What he desperately desired was a comprehensive philosophy that included himself, "a part," in something greater than himself, and which possessed complete meaning. Appleyard mentions that later in life Coleridge came to see that "the moral life demanded personal freedom."⁷⁸ It is precisely this factor, and a desire for something "great" that prompted Coleridge to reject Necessitarianism. Morality is something outside man, something that is part of the "one & indivisible." Hartley tried to reduce morality to a personal level. I think that Coleridge saw it as something outside man to which man had the choice whether to respond or not. In "Religious Musings," he says that only such a universal morality can lead man toward ultimate happiness:

whose presence lost [God's],
The moral world's cohesion, we become
An Anarchy of Spirits! . . . (ll. 144-146)

God provides or determines morality out of his infinite benevolent power. That man could reject God, reject morality, and degenerate into Anarchy, suggests that some power outside Necessity is in operation. Milton did not deny this element of mystery in free will or morality, although he attempted to explain it; and it is this sense of a universal morality in Milton to which Coleridge would respond.

⁷⁷Aids to Reflection, p. 288.

⁷⁸Appleyard, p. 28.

Traditionally, Coleridge was thought to be a "complete Necessitarian" until his visit to Germany in 1798-99. Only then, under the influence of Kant primarily, did he reject Necessitarianism and become what S. F. Gingerich calls a transcendentalist.⁷⁹ Later critics have tended to disagree that the rejection of Hartley's philosophy was as abrupt as Gingerich details it, and that Coleridge's commitment to Necessity was as strong as Coleridge and Gingerich make it out to be. Orsini finds Coleridge "shifting backwards and forwards in his attitude to Hartley" during the formative years, 1794-1803.⁸⁰ Richard Haven⁸¹ doubts Coleridge's complete slavery to Hartley, and shows how after writing "Religious Musings" his thought began to drift away from "all the nonsense of vibrations."⁸² Kathleen Coburn, in her commentary to the Notebooks, states that Coleridge's reading of Cudworth in late 1796 "evidently . . . helped to release Coleridge from associationism and necessitarianism."⁸³ Peter Mann agrees with Miss Coburn, but also points out that "the letters and notebooks suggest that the main challenge [to Necessity] came not from his reading (extensive as that was) but from his deeper and more complex sense of reality as a result of his personal experience; in particular, the

⁷⁹S. F. Gingerich, From Necessity to Transcendentalism in Coleridge (New York: Haskell House, 196_?)

⁸⁰Orsini, p. 22.

⁸¹Richard Haven, "Coleridge, Hartley, and the Mystics", Journal of the History of Ideas, XX (1959), 477-494.

⁸²Letters, I, 626.

⁸³Notebooks, I, notes to Entry 203.

quarrel with Southey, his observation of his wife's labour-pains, the death of his son Berkeley, and his own illnesses and moral conflicts all acted as intellectual solvents."⁸⁴ Approximately one year after completing "The Ancient Mariner," Coleridge writes to his wife concerning the death of her second son:

That God works by general laws are to me words without meaning or worse than meaningless--Ignorance and Imbecillity, and Limitation must wish in generals--What and who are these horrible shadows necessity and general law, to which God himself must offer sacrifices--hecatombs of Sacrifices?--I feel a deep conviction that these shadows exist not. . . . I confess that the more I think, the more I am discontented with the doctrines of Priestley.⁸⁵

The rejection is not complete, but, apparently, it had begun before April 1799.

Pertaining more to the case I have been trying to build up is the letter to George Coleridge dated 10 March 1798, written two weeks before Coleridge read "The Ancient Mariner" to the Wordsworths on 23 March 1798.⁸⁶ On Original Sin he writes:

I believe most stedfastly in original Sin; that from our mothers' wombs our understandings are darkened, and even where our understandings are in the Light, that our organization is depraved, & our volitions imperfect; and we sometimes see the good without wishing to attain it, and often wish it without the energy that wills & performs--And for this inherent depravity, I believe, that the Spirit of the Gospel is the sole cure.⁸⁷

Unfortunately, Coleridge does not tell us what he means by "Spirit of

⁸⁴Lectures 1795, p. 104n.

⁸⁵Letters, I, 482; 8 April 1799.

⁸⁶Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Annotated "Ancient Mariner", introduction and notes by Martin Gardner, illus. Gustave Doré (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1965), p. 18.

⁸⁷Letters, I, 396.

the Gospel." He does not mean the simple teachings of the Scriptures, but whether or not he means revelation on a moral plane is difficult to ascertain. The state of depravity mentioned in this letter seems closely akin to the depravity mentioned in the Lectures on Revealed Religion,⁸⁸ a depravity that falls outside of Hartley's man who automatically avoids pain. The simple fact that some men are depraved beyond the usual methods of Hartleian reclamation, and, therefore, must have willed this situation, is only implied in the Lectures. In the letter to his brother, Coleridge interestingly uses the phrase "the energy that wills & performs." Hartley's process of progressing to happiness also assumes an energy, but it is a divine energy not within the control of man who must necessarily submit to such a force. Basil Willey points out the flaws in Hartley's argument, and it appears that by March 1798 Coleridge had also seen some of the flaws. His energy that wills is an internal energy that can only be free will, the conscious desire to alter the personal circumstances of depravity and the outside forces that cause depravity.

In the same letter, Coleridge mentions another idea on sin that seems to be related to a footnote to "Religious Musings" already quoted: "Our evil Passions . . . may be made to animate our virtues."⁸⁹ He writes to George Coleridge:

With regard to myself, it is my habit, on whatever subject I think, to endeavour to discover all the good that has resulted from it, that does result, or that can result--to this I bind down my mind

⁸⁸Lectures 1795, p. 111; see above p. 20.

⁸⁹Works (1969), p. 112n.

and after long meditation in this tract, slowly & gradually make up my opinions on the quantity & the nature of the Evil.—I consider this as a most important rule for the regulation of the intellect & the affections—as the only means of preventing the passions from turning the Reason into an hired Advocate.⁹⁰

The content of these two passages contrasts sharply. In the 1797 footnote, Coleridge had no doubt that evil passions could be used for benevolent ends. In keeping with Hartley, it was a matter of course that evil would strengthen man's virtue. In the letter of 1798, Necessity is no longer present. Coleridge describes a constant internal battle between evil and virtue, where evil seems to be the natural tendency in depraved man. Instead of relying on the pains of evil to "animate" virtue, Coleridge has discovered that he first must eliminate evil from his mind and fill his thoughts with good before he can constructively approach evil within himself. Evil is no longer associated with pain which, according to Hartley, is automatically overshadowed by pleasure; evil can and will dominate. As early as 1794, Coleridge could write, "Wherever Men can be vicious, some will be."⁹¹ The idea never left Coleridge's mind. Only by an actively willed animation of virtue can evil be dealt with optimistically. Coleridge probably was not totally aware of the implications in the phrasing of his footnote, but, as I suggested, the notion of free will seems to be present in the specific wording, although a more idealized

⁹⁰Letters, I, 398.

⁹¹Letters, I, 114; to Robert Southey, 21 October 1794. Less than two months later Coleridge writes to Southey telling him that he is a "compleat Necessitarian." It seems reasonable to assume that Coleridge had been reading Hartley at least two months before this latter statement.

view of it.⁹²

Coleridge's devotion to Hartley and Priestley during the years 1795 to 1797 appears to be not as strong as it would first seem from his writings. His sources were plagued with contradictions and weak premises, and it was inevitable that Coleridge's thought would be as confused. Considering his strong Christian orthodoxy of much of his early life, his volatile mind which could embrace and reject various ideas in short periods of time, and his life-long habit of attempting to reconcile paradoxical and contradictory ideas, it would be difficult to label Coleridge a true Necessitarian at any time during these years, and especially during the writing of "The Ancient Mariner," from November 1797 to March 1798. That this confusion (or more probably, an attempt to synthesize the confusion into something meaningful) would enter "The Ancient Mariner" seems quite likely. The settled atmosphere of Stowey and the close friendship and intellectual stimulation from the Wordsworths seem to be partially responsible for the production of Coleridge's three best poems. Such an atmosphere would also, I think, give Coleridge a chance to clarify various contradictory strains of Christian philosophy that had been entering his mind for the past three years. Coleridge's attempt to reconcile free will, man's inherent depravity, superstition, punishment, and a Miltonian active virtue, with Hartley's Necessitarian optimism had already begun by March 1798 and was fairly complete by 1801. I would speculate that the writing of "The Ancient Mariner" would be

⁹²See above, p. 12.

intimately involved with such a reconciliation, and would reflect many of the ideas Coleridge did hold somewhat reluctantly before 1798, and those that he definitely did believe in after 1798.

II

CRIME

i Original Sin

To look at "The Ancient Mariner" in terms of sin, of crime and punishment, of ideas behind the Fall would be beneficial. To look at the Ancient Mariner's crime as an allegory or symbol of the Fall puts an uncalled-for strain upon the poem. Robert Penn Warren, in what has proven to be the most controversial essay on "The Ancient Mariner," does just this: "The act [the killing of the Albatross by the Mariner] symbolizes the Fall, and the Fall has two qualities important here: it is a condition of will, . . . and it is the result of no single human motive."¹ Warren comes to this conclusion using only the most meagre of evidence, namely, Coleridge was contemplating a poem on the origin of evil in 1796, and, Coleridge was concerned with the origin of evil in his later prose works that were written at least twenty years after "The Ancient Mariner." Warren seizes upon a decision by Coleridge to keep Original Sin a mystery² and links this with the Mariner's apparent lack of motivation, producing what looks like a modern day replica of the Fall from Eden. It is difficult to leave Warren's statement convinced of its validity.

It is equally difficult to accept G. Wilson Knight's similar

¹Warren, p. 82.

²Warren (p. 81) refers to a comment in Table Talk, 1 May 1830: "The mystery itself [Original Sin] is too profound for human insight."

sentiments on the Mariner's act: "The central crime corresponds to the fall, a thwarting of some guiding purpose by murderous self-will."³ Knight's basis for making such a statement is more tenuous than Warren's. Somehow, he reasons that since "the slaying of the Albatross in the Mariner's story may correspond to the death of Christ,"⁴ it follows that it also may represent the Fall. This sudden jump in time is made possible by an unsubstantial piece of archetypal reasoning which causes one to question both correspondences, and then reject both as purely subjective assessments.

R. L. Brett is more cautious, but still manages to arrive at the same conclusion:

It [the killing of the Albatross] is symbolical, if you like, of all sin. Sin is an unanalysable fact of human nature and in the long run not even in man's own interest; the Biblical story of the Fall is perhaps the classic example of man's cutting off his nose to spite his face. The Mariner is a true son of Adam for he, too, acts from pure wickedness. The acquiescence of his shipmates in the Mariner's crime makes the parallel even clearer; for we, too, though we did not actually participate in Adam's act are accomplices in his sin.⁵

Brett does not equate the Mariner with Adam, but, he suggests that this is the only way to approach the slaying of the Albatross because of typically Christian orthodox reasons. Again we are left unconvinced. Brett assumes that the Mariner acts from pure wickedness, and he

³G. Wilson Knight, "Coleridge's Divine Comedy", in M. H. Abrams, ed., English Romantic Poets Modern Essays in Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 160.

⁴Knight, p. 159.

⁵R. L. Brett, Reason and Imagination. A Study of Form and Meaning in Four Poems (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 100.

assumes that since the reader must identify with both crew and Mariner, all sin must be derived from Original Sin. It would be difficult to accept either premise, especially the last, without more substantial proof.

Such a symbolic reading of the Mariner's crime has been adequately refuted by many critics. Only a few need be mentioned. Humphry House makes the point that adducing a corruption of the Mariner's will cannot be substantiated by evidence inside the poem: "Any possible link with the Fall is of a different kind from the link with murder; for if such a link is there, it lies in the corruption of the human will by original sin and must be imported into the poem from outside, to explain the Mariner's motive, when he is not able or willing to explain it himself."⁶

Harold Bloom points out three inconsistencies in a symbolic reading of the Mariner's crime as the Fall, two of which are most certainly true: "Several influential modern readings of The Ancient Mariner have attempted to baptize the poem by importing into it the notion of Original Sin and the myth of the Fall. But the Mariner is neither disobedient in his dire action nor altered in nature by its first effects. There is nothing in him to suggest the depravity of the natural heart."⁷ This last inconsistency is rather inconsistent itself considering the letter to George Coleridge of March 1798.

⁶Humphry House, "The Ancient Mariner", in English Romantic Poets, p. 181.

⁷Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1961), p. 203.

Geoffrey Hartman makes a more sensible statement on the link between Original Sin and the slaying of the Albatross by the Mariner: "It [the crime] is a founding gesture, a caesura dividing stages of being. It may anticipate the modern 'acte gratuite' or reflect the willfulness [sic] in original sin, but only because both are epochal and determining acts of individuation."⁸ Hartman refuses to make the Mariner's crime an allegory or a symbol of Original Sin. Properly, I think, he sees the crime as only reflecting a specific element in Adam's fall, namely wilfulness. What is most important is that the crime appears to be a step towards individuation in the Mariner as defined by Carl Jung.⁹ This idea of Hartman's need not concern us just yet. More relevant is Hartman's refusal to assign any specific symbolical importance to the Mariner's crime. The slaying of the Albatross is undeniably a crime, and therefore, is linked in two ways to all other crime, or sin, or evil:¹⁰ a universal morality is

⁸Geoffrey H. Hartman, Wordsworth's Poetry 1787-1814 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p. 132.

⁹Hartman uses Jung's unnecessarily complicated definition out of his Modern Man in Search of a Soul (Hartman, p. 123). In Memories, Dreams, Reflections (New York: Vintage Press, 1961), pp. 395-396, Jung gives a layman's definition which is much more intelligible: "I use the term 'individuation' to denote the process by which a person becomes a psychological 'in-dividual,' that is, a separate, indivisible unity or 'whole.'" (The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, in Collected Works, Vol. 9, Part I, p. 275.) In other works, Jung equates individuation to concepts of "incomparable uniqueness," "coming to selfhood" or "self-realization." (Two Essays on Analytical Psychology, in Collected Works, Vol. 7, p. 171.) "Individuation . . . gathers the world to oneself." (The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche, Collected Works, Vol. 8, p. 226.)

¹⁰I consider the distinction between these three words to be negligible, at least in this paper. Sin, crime, and evil, if not synonymous, have one major factor in common---they are in violation of a universal moral code.

violated and the crime, as opposed to another action, is committed for some reason.

In Chapter I we saw how Coleridge would be responsive to the Miltonic idea of free will being involved in Original Sin. I think he also would be responsive to the motivation which Milton places behind the sin of Adam and Eve, and also the nature of Satan's crime. Turning first to the account in Genesis of the Fall, the lack of any solid motive for Eve eating the fruit is most apparent: she could only reply to God, "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate." (Genesis 3:13) But, at the actual time of the sin, three good motives, at least from Eve's point of view are stated: "the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise." (Genesis 3:6) The first two are undoubtedly true, but the third, and most important, proves to be false. If real motive is to be found we must look towards Eve's pride. Hence, since no motive that involved genuine benefit to Adam and Eve was present, commentators have considered the act wilfull disobedience and labeled it an unmotivated crime which over the past few thousand years has been used to explain all acts of depravity.

Milton does not accept this line of thought, and very specifically provides motivation for Eve's and Adam's disobedience, the same as in the Biblical account with a few dramatic embellishments. Eve is presented as a fairly complex character possessing an inquiring curiosity. She feels constrained by Adam's watchful eye and his strict obedience to God's pronouncements which diminishes her curiosity, and, thus, she desires to work alone in order to investigate her environment,

particularly the forbidden elements. She possesses a lively reasoning sense which Adam cannot adequately refute:

If this be our condition, thus to dwell
In narrow circuit strait'nd by a Foe,
Suttle or violent, we not endu'd
Single with like defence, wherever met,
How are we happie, still in fear of harm?
But harm precedes not sin: onely our Foe
Tempting affronts us with his foul esteem
Of our integritie: his foul esteeme
Sticks no dishonor on our Front, but turns
Foul on himself; then wherfore shund or feard
By us? who rather double honour gaine
From his surmise prov'd false, finde peace within,
Favour from Heav'n, our witness from th' event. (IX, 322-334)

The element of pride is unmistakable in her speech, but, still, her arguments have a convincing power, if a character of sufficient strength was propounding them.

As in the Bible, Eve's final motives for eating the fruit are proven unsubstantial and she recognizes her crime. But, before, and at the time of the action, she is thoroughly convinced that she is doing the right thing. It is not a motiveless crime from Eve's point of view. She is dissatisfied with her lot in Paradise and desires to improve it. She mistakenly takes the wrong path towards improvement. This is not to deny an element of depravity within Eve. She did wilfully disobey God. Her Right Reason was clouded by her passions, namely pride, but we cannot say that her depravity and sin were inherent, inescapable conditions of her mental being. Milton provides adequate motivation for her crime that Coleridge would not fail to recognize. It is this factor that links Eve's crime with all other crime. Man has the freedom to will depravity and usually he does. But, because he does possess free will (the ability to choose),

motivation is implied. One cause of action (sin) is chosen over another (virtuous behaviour) because that person is convinced, however unfounded his reasons may be, that he is doing something to his advantage, however perverted that something may seem to the normal mind.

Satan's crime is a case in point. Again we see pride overwhelming Right Reason. Satan is dissatisfied with his lot in Heaven and thinks that by overthrowing God his condition will be improved. Of course, it is not and he is reduced to setting up his own kingdom in Hell. But, still, adequate motivation for such action was present, at least from Satan's point of view.

More important, and bearing more directly on an aspect of sin in which Coleridge was interested, is Satan's comment spoken just previous to his arrival in Eden:

So farwel Hope, and with Hope farwel Fear,
Farwel Remorse: all Good to me is lost;
Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least
Divided Empire with Heav'ns King I hold
By thee, and more than half perhaps will reign. (IV, 108-112)

The speech is an ironic parody of the optimism behind the Fall--Adam's and Eve's sin is to lead to good eventually. Rather than relying on accident and on a promise of eventual salvation (if Satan were human), he consciously puts such optimism into action. The practice of evil will now be consciously turned towards Satan's benefit. A situation such as this certainly does not find its way into "The Ancient Mariner." But, the idea of consciously undertaken sin leading to good would, I think, strike a responsive chord in Coleridge's mind considering his views on sin examined in the previous chapter. This idea will be dealt with more fully in the following pages, but, a brief discussion

of crime is, I think, necessary before proceeding.

I think we tend to look at crime in two ways. In terms of social justice and in the spirit of the Old Testament, sin most commonly is considered to be a perversion of the will that causes pain to others and usually to the sinner. In a Christian context the sin is ultimately against God; in a social context against the state (individuals making up the state). Sinning traditionally demands punishment, typically in the form of a penance (or in harsher cases, death) which it is expected will lead the sinner to a repentance and eventual reconciliation with God or the state. The sin itself and the act of sinning are considered to be morally reprehensible and no redeeming quality of any kind is discovered in the sin or the act. The sinner learns nothing beyond the rather obtrusive moral that sin against God or the state should not be considered since punishment will follow. In other words, the benefits of not sinning outweigh the pains accompanying sin.

The other way of examining sin paradoxically originates from the Old Testament also, particularly from Genesis (the Fall of Adam and Eve from Paradise) and Job. In a Christian or social context, the sin is still morally reprehensible and is liable to punishment, but, the sinner learns something, or receives something, or benefits more than in the first case. A knowledge of good and evil, while the cause of earthly misery, leads Adam into a greater appreciation of his position in relation to God, and a greater love of God since he is now aware of alternatives. The non-virtue of Paradise is replaced by a positive virtue that must combat depravity (or lack of virtue),

and, thereby, increase in strength. This manner of looking at sin culminates in Milton's Paradise Lost and forms a basis of subsequent optimistic thought in literature. In addition, the sinner learns something about himself. In the case of Job, ignorance of God's power and ignorance of past sins are impressed upon his mind through his suffering. When repentance and reconciliation occur, Job knows much better his limitations and his true self as he relates to his world and God. In other words, sin has positive connotations associated with it. Sin can lead to a better life ultimately. Sin can increase self-knowledge and knowledge of the state of man. Sin can lead to truths. But, behind this notion and constantly qualifying it, is the idea that similar self-knowledge and truth can be attained through virtuous methods. The results can be arrived at without accompanying pain. In other words, the fortuitous results of some sin must be looked at as accidental. In most cases no truths are discovered from sinning. Only the exceptional person can become aware of the new found truths resulting from his particular sin, and, in the Christian context, this can only happen if a belief or faith in the benevolence of God is maintained.

A corollary to this second way of looking at sin crops up in the Renaissance with Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, and receives a much more thorough investigation in the Romantic period. The notion is simply this: does this second way of looking at sin have to be accidental, or can man consciously commit a sin and will or reason his way to truth while undergoing punishment or while avoiding punishment altogether? This Romantic conception of sin necessarily

downgrades the role that faith and, hence, God's grace and love play in the positive working out of the sin. The sinner depends on himself and his reason to work out the sin to a positive end result. In everything I have read, there seem to be two basic results: either the sinner rejects an exterior morality (and God) in the process and dooms himself because his own amoral creed constantly contradicts and runs up against an innate moral sense, or the sinner responds to the innate moral sense, repents, does penance, is reconciled with something outside of himself, and, in effect, accepts the second way of looking at sin and more or less rejects the idea that sin and self-will can lead to positive results without the aid of any exterior forces. Nowhere, at least in a serious work, does man sin and achieve positive results, and end up saying that sin can be looked upon as an important source of truth in exceptional cases. The optimism of Hartley, Priestley and Godwin incorporates this ideal view (if free will is ignored), but only in a general and universal sense with no space and time constrictions. When applied to the individual case, man (or the author) is unable to say that these exceptional cases exist. In any non-temporal and non-universal case, virtue and the acceptance of an exterior morality are superior to sin and a reliance on the individual will and reason.

There exists, I think, a corollary to the above corollary. In some cases the sin mentioned in the above paragraph will not be as consciously undertaken as, say, that of Faustus. The individual may be in a similar dilemma, that is, aware of the existence of truths which he does not have access to at the moment, or aware that something

is lacking in his view of life, but he does not have the intellectual powers or the powers of faith to exhaust the various pathways, some of which will lead to that truth. The intellectually superior man in the above corollary can reason his way into committing the sin, typically considering it to be the most dramatic, the most adventuresome, the most traumatic, and the surest way to bring him into contact with forces otherwise unavailable which may lead him to truths. Also typically, the intellectual's faith is lacking, either in God or in a valid morality outside himself. This other unendowed individual, while in the same dilemma, does not possess superior intellectual powers. He senses or intuits that there is something missing in his or in the generally accepted view of life. In addition, he can no longer rely on his own faith, or on his own mental convictions which ought to complement the view of life he is expected to or has embraced. He can only look outside himself for a solution and he is unable to see one.

In his ignorance, despair, rather than a conscious consideration of viable alternatives, sets in. He cannot accept his present state, but also has not the means to propel himself into a journey towards a new state. In his frustration he sins. Or equally possibly, he sins because of an unconscious or intuited notion that this misdirected action will at the least set the kettle boiling again, and relieve to some extent an intolerable situation, if nothing else. And perhaps, although not on a reasoning level, he thinks that his sin will lead him closer to an acceptable view of life. This last statement is not an unreasonable assumption on my part. Throughout this individual's

existence, a view of life has inexorably been tied up with good and evil, with virtuous and sinful actions. In his ignorance he could come to the similar (but completely unrefined) conclusion of the intellectually superior man: "Virtue and unbelieving acceptance have got me nowhere. Perhaps sin (what essentially amounts to a challenge of the accepted view of life) will open some doors." The difference between our two individuals is that the sin is not premeditated, and, hence, is somewhat unconscious in the latter's case. He does not consciously will something positive to result from his sin. He only wants a change in his present frustrated situation, and, as is only natural in man, hopes that something positive may result. The feeling that sin is associated with depravity would never really leave him since his intellectual powers cannot reason this problem away.

Literary analogues before 1798 for such an unendowed sinner are non-existent. I am speaking of what is essentially a tragic, or at least, not a comic situation. Aristotle's dictate that tragic heroes must be of the superior variety has given rise to only intellectual sinners. Such figures abound in comedy if only one considers that they are unendowed intellectually, they sin, and everything works out for the better, finally. Typically, they sin for monetary or sensual reasons. A search for self-assurance or a solid metaphysical belief is seldom, if ever, involved.

It is only with Wordsworth's decision to write of the common man,¹¹ not necessarily in comic situations, does such a figure appear

¹¹William Wordsworth, "Preface to Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems (1800)", in William Wordsworth, Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth, ed. P. M. Zall (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 18.

in English literature. Although not exactly resembling my hypothetical, intellectually inferior sinner, the murderer in "Guilt and Sorrow" and the woman in "The Thorn" deal with the mental problems of the non-intellectual sinner. It appears as if the lady in Coleridge's fragment "The Ballad of the Dark Ladié" does likewise. "The Ancient Mariner" also deals with such a man who, I think, sins in much the same way as I have detailed in my second corollary. Coleridge may have been indebted to Wordsworth for the decision to write of the experiences of the Mariner, but, more than likely, Coleridge found it necessary to employ such a figure. He states in Biographia Literaria:

It was agreed [in the plan of Lyrical Ballads] that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.¹²

As W. J. B. Owen points out in the introduction to his edition of Lyrical Ballads, Coleridge had conceived and written the poem before Lyrical Ballads came to the minds of Wordsworth and Coleridge.¹³ But, if we can trust the Biographia at least to some extent, we can see that Coleridge's conception of the supernatural precludes the use of an intellectually superior hero. Such a man would immediately question, doubt, and even challenge any hint of the supernatural, rather than reacting as the Mariner does. The reader's "willing suspension of

¹²Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. George Watson (New York: Dent, 1967), pp. 168-169.

¹³William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads 1798, ed. W. J. B. Owen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. vii-x.

disbelief" would be inhibited to some degree by a character who reacted as we like to think we would react. The Mariner, with his strongly developed intuitive sense and lack of reasoning power, could only let his imagination run free when he came in contact with the supernatural. And only such a character as the Mariner could induce a like response in the reader.

To say that the Mariner fits into my second corollary category of sinners, which is only hypothetical, leads one into the most common of logical mistakes. Only a close examination of the Mariner's crime and of the types of 'literary' sin which would affect Coleridge at the time of writing will permit us to class the Mariner thus.

ii Cain and the Wandering Jew

Coleridge, true to the Romantic spirit, was interested in two quite famous criminals, one of whom inspired a fragmentary prose piece "The Wanderings of Cain." The other, the Wandering Jew, finds his way into the "Gutch Notebook" in an entry which Kathleen Coburn does not date but which appears to be 1795. As usual, Coleridge planned a poem which was never written: "Wandering Jew/ a romance."¹⁴ Before proceeding with a discussion of these two figures, let me repeat a warning issued by John Livingston Lowes: "the Mariner is not the Wandering Jew. Coleridge's art is not so crass as that. The poem is no 'New Adventures of Ahasuerus.' It is a subtle transfer to a figure which is essentially a new creation, of associations that had long been gathering about an accepted and mysterious personality of legend."¹⁵ Despite the manuscript note that surfaced after the above passage was written, Lowes is still quite correct. Coleridge writes:

It is an enormous blunder . . . to represent the An. M. as an old man on board ship. He was in my mind the everlasting wandering Jew—had told this story ten thousand times since the voyage, which was in his early youth and 50 years before.¹⁶

Coleridge names only two details that relate the Mariner to the Wandering Jew: their longevity, and desire to recount their tales of woe. There

¹⁴Notebooks, I, Entry 45.

¹⁵John Livingston Lowes, The Road to Xanadu. A Study in the Ways of the Imagination (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955), p. 228.

¹⁶Notebooks, I, notes to Entry 45; from a MS in Victoria College Library.

are many other differences which would ruin an allegorical reading of "The Ancient Mariner" in terms of the Wandering Jew. John Beer points out that the "Wandering Jew is rarely, if ever, associated with the sea."¹⁷ There is no aura of murder surrounding the Wandering Jew, nor does his crime bring such destruction to others. This fact points out precisely the value of Lowes' study. In four hundred odd pages he demonstrates adequately that Coleridge's mind was not geared to think in allegorical terms. As I suspect everybody does, he borrowed from innumerable sources and evolved his own imaginative creation. "The secret of the Mariner's hold on our imagination lies, in large part, precisely in this interpenetration of the Old Navigator and the Eternal Wanderer in Coleridge's visionary world."¹⁸ The Mariner may have borrowed one or two traits from his companion, but he is his own man, a character complete unto himself. There is not a one to one correspondence with Adam, or the Wandering Jew or Coleridge.

Keeping this fact in mind, let us take a look at the crime and subsequent actions of the Wandering Jew. In an excellent study entitled The Legend of the Wandering Jew, George K. Anderson details the wanderings of the Jew from legend to legend from the time of Christ to the present. The legend originates from one of those inexplicable unrecorded events that grew out of the Biblical treatment of Christ's

¹⁷J. B. Beer, Coleridge the Visionary (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), p. 145.

¹⁸Lowes, p. 228.

¹⁹George K. Anderson, The Legend of the Wandering Jew (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965).

crucifixion:

The true Legend of the Wandering Jew, . . . is the tale of a man in Jerusalem who, when Christ was carrying his Cross to Calvary and paused to rest for a moment on this man's doorstep, drove the Saviour away (with or without physical contact, depending on the variants), crying aloud, "Walk faster!" And Christ replied, "I go, but you will walk until I come again!"²⁰

As the crime stands without its innumerable accretions, it bears a striking resemblance to the Mariner's crime in three ways: it appears to be unpremeditated, a rule of hospitality is broken, and the punishment is onerous compared to the actual crime, especially considering the person who metes out the punishment. Significantly, the crime (if such an indignity to Christ can be called a crime) as it appears in the legend is not motivated. We may speculate upon possible motivation: the man was a Jew and therefore probably hostile towards Christ, or perhaps he disliked strangers using his property, or perhaps he was simply habitually discourteous, a condition caused by some past event in his life. The desire to discover motivation wanes when we are told of his punishment, but, very soon we begin to question the severity of the punishment compared to the relative innocence of his crime. Hundreds of other people were undoubtedly discourteous that day in Jerusalem. Why was this man singled out? We are not told, but, I think, we would automatically turn to the Wandering Jew's motive to look for an answer. It is these elements, the seeming unfairness of the punishment and the seeming motivelessness of the crime that find their ways into "The Ancient Mariner."

We know that Coleridge was familiar with the basic legend, for

²⁰Anderson, p. 11.

it appears more or less as above in a poem "The Wandering Jew" printed in Bishop Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) of which, as Lowes points out, Coleridge owned a copy.²¹ The poem is embellished considerably, but, the essential tale remains:

Being weary, thus, he [Christ] sought for rest, to ease his
burthen'd Soul
Upon a stone; the which a Wretch did churlishly controul.
And said, "Away, thou King of Jews, thou shall not rest thee
here;
Pass on; thy Execution-place, thou seest, now draweth near."

And thereupon he thrust him thence, at which our Saviour
said,
"I sure will rest, but thou shalt Walk, and have no journey
stayed."²²

What Coleridge would notice about the Wandering Jew's crime, apart from the three elements of motivation detailed above, is the optimistic note the poet gives to the legend. The Jew is converted to Christianity and experiences a love for Christ. His centuries of wandering have been spent "Declaring still the power of Him," with the result that the nations of the world "hearing of the Name of Christ, their Idol Gods do change."²³ Despite the severity of his punishment, the Wandering Jew has learned from his crime, has repented, and now preaches a message (he "Affirm[s] still that Jesus Christ of him hath daily care."²⁴) which certainly promises him eternal salvation when

²¹Lowes, p. 222.

²²John Ker Roxburghe, ed., Roxburghe Ballads (London, 1868-95), VI, 693-94; quoted in Anderson, pp. 61-62. Anderson points out that this is the seventeenth-century version; Percy's version was similar with a few minor changes.

²³Anderson, p. 62.

²⁴Anderson, p. 62.

his time for death arrives. His message is one of love and charity, precisely those qualities he was lacking at the time of his crime. This optimistic note bears a noticeable resemblance to "The Ancient Mariner," but only in this aspect. Coleridge may have unconsciously borrowed the idea, but in no way is the Mariner's story a conscious reworking of the Wandering Jew's activities. And, besides, such an optimistic strain is in complete keeping with Coleridge's mind in 1797 and would have undoubtedly surfaced in "The Ancient Mariner" if he had not read this ancient ballad.

Coleridge was familiar with many other versions of the Wandering Jew legend as Lowes points out,²⁵ but most notably with two: Schiller's figure of Ahasuerus in The Ghost-Seer, and M. G. Lewis' Wandering Jew in The Monk. The Armenian in The Ghost-Seer, who inexplicably is also a mysterious Russian officer, is never referred to as the Wandering Jew. The Sicilian charlatan, who tells the Prince the story of the Armenian, thinks that he is the disciple of John "of whom it is said---he shall remain until the last judgment."²⁶ As Anderson points out, the legend of this disciple is one of the many threads that eventually found its way into the Wandering Jew story.²⁷ The Armenian's function in this prose fragment is never really explained. He certainly does not preach a Christian message, and, in fact, seems to be a rather

²⁵Lowes, pp. 220-230.

²⁶Frederick Schiller, The Ghost-Seer, in The Works of Frederick Schiller. Early Dramas and Romances, translated chiefly by H. G. Bohn (London: Bell & Daldy, 1871), p. 407.

²⁷Anderson, p. 14.

malevolent figure who effectually leads the Prince away from the paths of virtue and reasonable behaviour. But, as Anderson points out, he "bobs up at the end to sponsor the reform of the Prince,"²⁸ in a specifically Christian context. Baron F_____ writes to Count O_____: "Do you remember the Armenian who perplexed us so much last year? In his arms you will find the Prince, who five days since attended mass for the first time."²⁹ We are never told why, but apparently the Armenian has led the Prince into degeneracy and back out again. The details of this journey will be left until later.

This same element of Christian benevolence appears in the Wandering Jew digression in Lewis' The Monk.³⁰ Raymond, partial narrator of the story, has become involved with the Bleeding Nun, a spirit who wanders eternally, attaching herself to various individuals apparently for malevolent reasons. The Wandering Jew exorcizes the spirit by revealing the burning mark of the cross on his forehead (the sign of Cain), and tells Raymond to bury the bones of the nun so that an end will be put to her wanderings. Raymond accomplishes this simple deed and returns to health. Lewis' Wandering Jew is far less interesting than Schiller's Armenian, but he still struck a responsive note in Coleridge. In his review of The Monk, Coleridge thinks Lewis' Jew inferior when compared to Schiller's Armenian, but still praises

²⁸Anderson, p. 175.

²⁹The Ghost-Seer, p. 482.

³⁰M. G. Lewis, The Monk, ed. L. F. Peck and intro. J. Berryman (New York: Grove Press, 1952).

Lewis for his "'great vigour of fancy.'"³¹ Coleridge seems to be referring to Lewis' imaginative introduction of such a figure and such a digression; but, I would think that this same keynote of benevolence after misfortune would also appeal to Coleridge.

Anderson mentions in his book how the legend of Cain and the Wandering Jew became intertwined into one legend during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Lewis' Wandering Jew is a case in point; the mark of Cain did not appear on his forehead in the original legends. Coleridge's fascination with Cain is well known. Upon his insistence, he and Wordsworth attempted a collaboration on a prose version of what Coleridge later called "The Wanderings of Cain." The collaboration was a failure, Wordsworth writing nothing and Coleridge producing the second of three parts. Coleridge writes that the attempt broke up in laughter and "the Ancient Mariner was written instead."³² Before examining the connections Coleridge would notice in the two legends, we should look at the Biblical account of Cain's crime and punishment.

Cain's crime is, of course, that of murdering his brother Abel. Both offered gifts to the Lord, and, while Abel's was accepted, Cain's did not find favour. Angry at his rejection, Cain takes Abel out to a field where he slays him. He is discovered by God and punished in a manner quite similar to that of the Wandering Jew; he is condemned

³¹ Critical Review, XIX (Feb. 1797), 194; quoted in Lowes, p. 224.

³² Works (1969), p. 287; preface to the 1828 publication of "The Wanderings of Cain."

to be "a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth," doomed never to be slain (Genesis 4:12). That he lives forever is not stated, but becomes part of the Cain legend. Again, the pattern is similar to Eve's and the Wandering Jew's crimes. The actual slaying seems to be primarily unpremeditated, essentially a passionate act. And, in this case, motivation is present. Out of jealousy for his brother arises the rather naïve idea that if Abel no longer can offer up gifts, surely Cain's gifts will find favour. The solution—kill Abel. True to Milton's ideas on free will and reason, Cain's passions destroy his Right Reason so that he can perversely think of sinning in order to benefit his situation. The parallel with Eve is obvious. Noticeably lacking in the Biblical story is an optimistic conclusion. A hint of repentance is seen in Cain's words to God: "'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me this day away from the ground; and from thy face I shall be hidden,'" (Genesis 4:13-14) but Cain leaves the presence of the Lord and sires a race devoted to bloody revenge.

Coleridge's "The Wanderings of Cain" is too fragmentary to draw any definite conclusions on how he would treat Cain's sin and punishment. Nothing is mentioned of the crime itself. We only see a picture of Cain wishing for death while his son, Enos, urges him on to further life. Cain engages an evil spirit disguised as the deceased Abel, but the results of this encounter were not composed. More interesting is the plan E. H. Coleridge reproduces apparently for this unfinished second canto. Cain, seemingly repentant (although, perhaps, only because he can no longer cope with his punishment) encounters

the evil spirit, is about to submit, but is saved by the angel Michael and his real brother in angelic form. The spirit and the two angels depart, taking with them Enos and leaving Cain mystified.³³ Coleridge leaves no hints as to what the third canto contains, but, I think it safe to speculate that it would probably be optimistic in nature. The angelic Abel's intervention most obviously corresponds to God's mercy, a mercy that will be extended to Cain once the terms of punishment have been met. We could further speculate that Cain will come around to a truly repentant frame of mind, will discover a few essential moral truths, and will be promised eventual salvation. I have shown that Coleridge's mind could operate in terms of such speculations. It thus seems reasonable to assume that the dramatic entrance of the two angels must signify a turning point in Cain's suffering, more than likely for the better, which is not an unbelievable ending to the prose tale.

Lowes, whose "racy" prose is too irresistible not to quote in full, demonstrates in a chapter of his book just how these two legends, and many others, were absorbed into Coleridge's mind as one whole, and absorbed into "The Ancient Mariner":

And here ends the tale of what happened to an Old Navigator in quest of incarnation on an autumn afternoon. And if ever there was an exemplification of the strange union of accident and intent, of subliminal confluence and conscious design in the workings of the shaping spirit, it is found in this true story of how the Wandering Jew and Cain together took possession of the astral body of an ancient Mariner.³⁴

³³Works (1969), pp. 285-286.

³⁴Lowes, p. 238.

To these two figures I would add Eve. A pattern of sin, punishment, and redemption is common to all three, at least as Coleridge knew them. Each sins in an unpremeditated way. Each of the sins seems to arise from a passionate action of the moment. But, and most significantly, each of the sins can be seen as being motivated. The perverseness of the motivation is irrelevant. Each feels he has sufficient reason for sinning which propels him through committing the crime. All endure extremely harsh punishments, but repentance occurs. Accompanying this repentance is an increase in self-knowledge and a new awareness of the power of God. In each case the sin has led to the discovery of new truths that apparently were unobtainable previous to sinning. Each is promised a greater reward once the penance has run its course. And, finally, each of the crimes was undertaken from self-volition. No notions of Necessity are attached to the crimes.

What is missing is the idea of a conscious undertaking of sinful behaviour in order to arrive at new truths. Each of these figures discovers the new truths accidentally. Milton makes it clear that it is fortunate that Adam and Eve did sin, for only after sin does a reward, more splendid than Eden, become available. The crimes of Cain and the Wandering Jew are not as fortunate. In Coleridge's fragment, Cain can only look upon his punishment as intolerable hardship. Whether he comes to view the punishment as being worthwhile, considering the truths he discovers, remains a mystery. The Wandering Jew in Percy's ballad is less antagonistic toward his punishment. He still desires death, but the very fact that he does preach and does convert,

consoles him to some extent.

Significantly, all three figures are of the less endowed variety. All are dissatisfied with their present situation: Milton's Eve desires knowledge, Cain desires the favour of God, and we may speculate that the Wandering Jew does not like the intrusion of Christianity upon his established faith. Each acts in order to alleviate his distress. The acts themselves can only be looked at as accidental or unpremeditated, perverting the present order so that punishment must follow. None are aware of the consequences that will follow, and none think consciously of the benefits that eventually do arise. But the fact that benefits do accrue would be impressed upon Coleridge's optimistic mind. The other element of sin with which Coleridge (and most Romantics) was concerned, namely a consciously undertaken sin for essentially benevolent purposes, is to be traced in other works contemporary with these formative years in Coleridge's life.

iii Romantic Sin

John Livingston Lowes has made us aware of Coleridge's incredible reading skills. The record we have of the numerous volumes he delved into can only be partial. Of fictional works on criminal evil we can speculate with reasonable assurance that he was familiar with most, if not all, of the significant works published by his contemporaries. I will look at only seven of these: Schiller's The Robbers and The Ghost-Seer, Lewis' The Monk, Radcliffe's The Romance of the Forest, Godwin's Caleb Williams, Wieland's Oberon, and Wordsworth's The Borderers. All contain material that is relevant to Coleridge's multi-hued conception of sin, The Borderers most importantly so, but I will reserve a discussion of it until Chapter III. Before he read The Borderers, Schiller's drama and prose fragment made the greatest impact on Coleridge during these formative years, so I will begin with a discussion of The Robbers.

On 3 November 1794, Coleridge writes to Southey concerning a reading of The Robbers in English translation:

'Tis past one o'clock in the morning--I sate down at twelve o'clock to read the 'Robbers' of Schiller--I had read chill and trembling until I came to the part where Moor fires a pistol over the Robbers who are asleep--I could read no more--My God! Southey! Who is this Schiller? This Convulser of the Heart? Did he write his Tragedy amid the yelling of Fiends?--I should not like to [be] able to describe such Characters--I tremble like an Aspen Leaf-- Upon my Soul, I write to you because I am frightened--I had better go to Bed. Why have we ever called Milton sublime? That Count de Moor--horrible Wielder of heart-withering Virtues--! Satan is scarcely qualified to attend his Execution as Gallows Chaplain.³⁵

³⁵Letters, I, 122.

The Count de Moor is Francis, villainous brother of Charles who, because of the false representations of Francis, has turned to a life of crime. Repenting, he returns to his father's castle, discovers the deception, and finally, with the help of his band of robbers, overthrows Francis, is reconciled to his father and Amelia, and finally gives himself up to certain death. The plot is familiar, for Coleridge based his Osorio on Schiller's play. All that concerns us at this point is the motivations behind the brothers' sinful behaviours.

Francis in no way resembles the Ancient Mariner. He is an evil character, and, except for a few faint attempts at repentance, dies evil. But one particular statement of his has, I think, bearing on how Coleridge would conceive of and write about crime in 1797. The following excerpt is from Francis' first long soliloquy:

No! no! I do her [nature] injustice—she bestowed inventive faculty, and set us naked and helpless on the shore of this great ocean, the world,—let those swim who can—the heavy may sink. To me she gave nought else, and how to make the best use of my endowment is my present business. Men's natural rights are equal; claim is met by claim, effort by effort, and force by force—right is with the strongest—the limits of our power constitute our laws.³⁶

The lack of Christian mercy, charity, forgiveness, and, above all, a neglect of a universal morality, destroy Francis' arguments, at least for the audience. But some truth does remain. Francis believes in free will, which either benefits oneself or permits oneself to be swallowed by the "ocean." Man's lot is to make the best and most proper use of his endowments, although certainly not for Francis'

³⁶ Frederick Schiller, The Robbers, in The Works of Frederick Schiller, p. 8.

particular ends. What would interest Coleridge is the soundness of Francis' premises and the perverted ends towards which they are used. As Schiller intended, I think, the self-sufficiency of Francis would be appealing, if his lack of Christian ethics is ignored.

In an extremely passionate speech, Charles, who is essentially good, talks himself into the life of a murderer and robber:

My soul's athirst for deeds, my spirit pants for freedom. Murderers, robbers! with these words I trample the law underfoot--mankind threw off humanity, when I appealed to it--Away, then, with human sympathies and mercy! I no longer have a father, no longer affections; blood and death shall teach me to forget that any thing was ever dear to me! Come! come! Oh, I will recreate myself with some most fearful vengeance.³⁷

Up to this point in the play, Charles has been the opponent of his friends' activities. But in frustration and anger, he is willing to turn to just those things he condemned in order to take vengeance on a humanity that has rejected him. In the speech, Charles injects what appears to be an optimistic note. Murder and robbery will be the key to recreation. The meaning of "recreate" is rather ambiguous. It could simply mean that Charles plans to recreate himself anew as robber chief. In addition, the notion of recreation in the sense of rebirth is present, a rebirth into new truths about himself and others so that he is able to understand his rejection. This notion is closely akin to Coleridge's idea of trying evil in order to discover the nature of good. Charles is able only to recognize the goodness in him and others and the existence of a morality outside himself after he leads the band of robbers on their murderous expeditions. Just

³⁷The Robbers, p. 24.

before searching out his brother, Charles gives way to despair:

My innocence! give me back my innocence! Behold, every living thing is gone forth to bask in the cheering rays of the vernal sun---why must I alone inhale the torments of hell out of the joys of heaven?---All are so happy, all so united in brotherly love, by the Spirit of peace!---The whole world ONE family, and one Father above---but He not MY father!---I alone the outcast, I alone rejected from the ranks of the blessed.³⁸

It is only after sinning that Charles can recognize this view of life as existing. The workings of sin are closely parallel to the three cases already examined. Only through evil does one discover the true nature and worth of Christian virtue.

Schiller examines this optimistic view of sin more thoroughly in The Ghost-Seer. The Prince, the unnamed hero of the fragment, is described by the narrator:

Wrapped in his own visionary ideas, he was often a stranger to the world about him; and, sensible of his own deficiency in the knowledge of mankind, he scarcely ever ventured an opinion of his own, and was apt to pay an unwarrantable deference to the judgment of others. Though far from being weak, no man was more liable to be governed.³⁹

To counteract this deficiency, the Prince first turns to the supernatural. To the Sicilian charlatan he says, "My intentions are most pure. I want truth."⁴⁰ The nature of this truth is left unrevealed, but, as events prove, he appears to be looking for particular philosophical truths which will reconcile his visionary ideas with the world about him. The supernatural experience proves unsuccessful, so the Prince immerses himself in the elite society of the town. Before this happens

³⁸The Robbers, p. 71.

³⁹The Ghost-Seer, p. 378.

⁴⁰The Ghost-Seer, p. 388.

the narrator is careful to reveal the Prince's alienation from the Christian religion and the skepticism which develops out of his rejection. The private society into which the Prince is admitted is shown to be evil. The Prince enters with the hope of discovering "certain dangerous truths" and leaves contaminated by a "fatal poison" which destroys "the basis on which his morality rested."⁴¹ The progress of the Prince after this experience is expectedly all downhill. He becomes involved with the disreputable higher classes, and also seems to be involved with a rather malevolent, evil side of the supernatural. He is inexplicably rescued from his degeneracy by the strange Armenian and set back on a path toward Christian regeneration.

The same pattern already discussed has emerged again, with one notable difference—the Prince is intellectually superior and relies on reason instead of an inbred intuition. He recognizes the lack of something inside him which he can only call "truth," and sets out to fill the cavity. His first experiences are essentially virtuous encounters with the supernatural, but, finding nothing, he turns to the less virtuous and finally to the totally evil in order to discover his "truths." He relies on his reason and his innate morality to guide his search properly, but both fail because they are centred within and not outside himself. His skepticism has destroyed any faith he may have had in the divine or universal.

The three English works left to be discussed—Caleb Williams,

⁴¹The Ghost-Seer, pp. 432-433.

The Romance of the Forest,⁴² and The Monk—interest us less. In each, an intellectually superior person commits a serious crime, not with the intention of discovering new truths, but simply to satisfy sinful desires. Interestingly enough though, each of the sinful characters attempts to verify what he thinks is truth by sinning. Trying to convince La Motte, a character on the brink of becoming villainous, to murder a girl under his protection, the Marquis de Montalt (the true villain) expounds in terms strikingly similar to arguments used by Francis in The Robbers and Osorio:

There are certain prejudices attached to the human mind . . . which it requires all our wisdom to keep from interfering with our happiness; certain set notions, acquired in infancy, and cherished involuntarily by age, which grow up and assume a gloss so plausible that few minds, in what is called a civilized country, can afterwards overcome them. Truth is often perverted by education. While the refined Europeans boast a standard of honour, and a sublimity of virtue, which often leads them from pleasure to misery, and from nature to error, the simple, uninformed American follows the impulse of his heart; and obeys the inspiration of wisdom. . . . There are . . . people of minds so weak, as to shrink from acts they have been accustomed to hold wrong, however advantageous. They never suffer themselves to be guided by circumstances, but fix for life upon a certain standard, from which they will, on no account, depart.⁴³

⁴²There is no doubt that Coleridge had read Caleb Williams by 1797, for he quotes from it in his Lectures 1795, p. 7. Whether or not he had read The Romance of the Forest is open to question. Lowes points out that he reviewed Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho (p. 498n), and in the notes to The Watchman, Lewis Patton mentions that Boaden's Fontainville Forest (1794), a play under discussion by Coleridge, was based on The Romance of the Forest. In addition, Émile Legouis in his The Early Life of William Wordsworth (London: Dent, 1921) points out that Wordsworth read Radcliffe's novel before writing The Borderers in 1795-96.

⁴³Ann Radcliffe, The Romance of the Forest: Interspersed with Some Pieces of Poetry (2nd ed.; London: T. Hookhan & J Carpenter, 1792), II, 282-284; (an authorized Reprint of the Original Edition, Produced by Microfilm-Xerography by University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1964). The older form of s [f] has been modernized in all cases.

Montalt's argument is familiar. He appeals to self-interest (advantage and self-preservation) as a justification for murder. A universal moral code which exists outside oneself is simply ignorant superstition.

"Truth" lies in oneself and the power one has over one's environment. La Motte eventually rejects the argument, and the powers of universal morality converge to destroy Montalt, just as Francis and Osorio are destroyed.

It is not necessary to discuss Caleb Williams or The Monk at any length. Falkland, the villain of Caleb Williams and counterpart to Osorio, Francis and Montalt, uses similar arguments to justify murder, unsuccessfully of course. Ambrosio, the title figure in The Monk, seems to be the male counterpart of Milton's Eve. Trusting in his own unknown character too much, he sins and wades deeper and deeper into villainy until a final repentance and death result.

One work remains to be briefly discussed. Werner W. Beyer in his book The Enchanted Forest, makes a strong case for Coleridge being most certainly influenced by Wieland's Oberon. In a letter to Joseph Cottle dated circa 20 November 1797, Coleridge writes that he is "translating the Oberon of Wieland," and at that time had completed "a ballad of about 300 lines."⁴⁴ Griggs speculates that the ballad is "The Ancient Mariner" which seems possible since Coleridge had apparently commenced writing on the thirteenth or fourteenth of November. Beyer makes much of Coleridge's plan to write a poem on the Origin of Evil: "With his interest in the Origin of Evil he evidently saw in

⁴⁴Letters, I, 357.

it [Oberon] a provocative instance of disobedience: a fall or sin of the will followed by long penance."⁴⁵ This is probably true, but what interests us at this moment is the description of Huon's fall.

Beyer summarizes the Oberon, Canto VII:

Late one starry night when even the steersman nods, only the lovers toss sleepless in adjoining chambers. Rezia, thinking Huon ill, enters his cabin. Struggling against a flood of passion, he wildly draws back. Innocently she sinks down in bitter tears, until Huon take [sic] her in his arms, and as if unconsciously their love is consummated.⁴⁶

Huon acts exactly opposite to Ambrosio. He avoids Rezia, fearful of his own weakness. Accidentally he sees her, and, significantly, he breaks his vow "as if unconsciously." The actual act of sinning has no connections whatever with self-discovery or a search for truth, but the element of unconscious sin was apparently attractive to Coleridge. The Mariner's sin, if nothing else, at least seems to be associated with unconscious behaviour, with behaviour that does not have the sanction of reason or morality or even the passions.

These six works (with the exception of Oberon) have little or no connection with "The Ancient Mariner" if they are looked at as fictional examinations of crime and punishment. In fact, it is, I think, the element of specious reasoning in an intellectually superior individual that Coleridge reacts against. The various justifications of sin by the characters are notably undramatic and unrealistic. This is not to say that such an individual would not use such an argument.

⁴⁵Werner W. Beyer, The Enchanted Forest (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963), p. 113.

⁴⁶Beyer, p. 15.

He would and I am sure that many do, but not in the melodramatic situations displayed in these works. And, we must remember Wordsworth's decision to deal with common people, a decision that would influence Coleridge's thoughts on the use of characters resembling the Prince or Charles in his poems published in Lyrical Ballads. In terms of my two corollaries, I think that Coleridge found that men of the first had been dealt with in literature for hundreds of years. The results of such sin were predictable; man cannot be a god unto himself. Something outside himself must eventually defeat a self-centred morality or immorality. The idea of someone challenging the established powers was, of course, appealing, but I imagine that Coleridge discovered that a man such as the Ancient Mariner challenging such powers would be a novel one, and, as I suggested, it was almost necessary that such a man be the central figure in the poem. What is essentially the tale of Faustus would not produce a great amount of novelty. What would be is a man going through a similar experience but of the opposite character of Faustus, a man who possessed little reasoning power but a strong intuitive sense upon which he relied, especially while at sea.

While reading about and reacting against such amply endowed figures as the Prince or Francis or Falkland, Coleridge would also pick up other ideas on sin, such as the element of the unconscious, the deliberate pursuit of sin in quest of truth and self-discovery, the element of specious reasoning, the element of blindness to one's weaknesses, and the element of skepticism whether it be of established truth (universal morality) or of the validity of one's surroundings.

Again I stress, just as Lowes and others have done, I do not think that Coleridge consciously searched out these items that relate to sin.

Planning an epic on the Origin of Evil, he would be vitally interested in all sin of which he read or heard. And, as Lowes points out, all reading or tales listened to seem to have gone into Coleridge's encyclopædic mind, only to emerge later in poetry transformed and shaped anew. It is simply the generalized ideas of sin, not the actual characters sinning, which find their way into "The Ancient Mariner."

III

SELF-ASSERTION

i "The Borderers"

Except for Wieland's Oberon, Coleridge had read the works discussed in the last chapter at least a year before he began to write "The Ancient Mariner." In early June of 1797, Coleridge read another fictional work that was to influence him more profoundly (at least where sin is considered) than any other contemporary work. I am referring, of course, to Wordsworth's tragedy The Borderers.¹ On June 8, Coleridge writes to Joseph Cottle, praising Wordsworth in expansive terms:

Wordsworth has written a Tragedy himself. I speak with heart-felt sincerity & (I think) unblinded judgement, when I tell you, that I feel myself a little man by his side; & yet do not think myself the less man, than I formerly thought myself.--His Drama is absolutely wonderful. You know, I do not commonly speak in such abrupt & unmingled phrases--& therefore will the more readily believe me.--There are in the piece those profound touches of the human heart, which I find three or four times in 'The Robbers' of Schiller, & often in Shakespere--but in Wordsworth there are no inequalities. T. Poole's opinion of Wordsworth is--that he is the greatest Man, he ever knew--I coincide.²

¹William Wordsworth, The Borderers, in Wordsworth Poetical Works, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, newly revised and edited by Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1969). All quotations will be acknowledged in the text. I will be using the version which Wordsworth first published in 1842. Ernest de Selincourt, in his notes to Vol. I of the Oxford Wordsworth, mentions the existence of four manuscripts, two of which date pre-"Ancient Mariner." The initial version is quite mutilated and contains less than half of the play. The second, a revision for the Covent Garden stage, is essentially the play published in 1842. Coleridge undoubtedly would have been familiar with this second manuscript. See below, p. 81.

²Letters, I, 325.

Putting aside the lavish praise, what Coleridge finds most appealing are those "profound touches of the human heart," which The Borderers contains in every scene and in every character: "there are no inequalities." I think it apparent that The Borderers, and particularly the actions of Marmaduke and Oswald, struck an especially responsive chord in Coleridge. For him to heap such praise on what proved to be only second-rate tragedy indicates that Coleridge must have been in accord with Wordsworth's conception of sin. And, upon examination, we will discover that the playing off of two essentially different characters provided Coleridge with the needed impetus in order to conceive of such a character as the Mariner who, I think, in many ways is derived from both Marmaduke and Oswald.

Wordsworth wrote a preface to The Borderers in 1797 which was not published in his lifetime, but which Coleridge more than likely read.³ In it Wordsworth summarizes the character of Oswald as he hoped he had portrayed him:

Let us suppose a young man of great intellectual powers yet without any solid principles of genuine benevolence. . . . It is his pleasure and his consolation to hunt out whatever is bad in actions usually esteemed virtuous, and to detect the good in actions which the universal sense of mankind teaches us to reprobate. . . . He has rebelled against the world and the laws of the world, and he regards them as tyrannical masters. . . . his reason is almost exclusively employed in justifying his past enormities and in enabling him to commit new ones. . . . Having indulged a habit, dangerous in a man who has fallen, of dallying with moral calculations, he becomes

³William Wordsworth, "Preface to The Borderers", in Literary Criticism of William Wordsworth, ed. P. M. Zall. Zall mentions that the preface was prepared "when he [Wordsworth] revised the play for the stage." (p. 3) In a letter dated Circa 20 November 1797, Coleridge writes that he is attempting to get Wordsworth's tragedy produced at Covent Garden, indicating that Coleridge was familiar with the revised play, and probably the preface.

an empiric, and a daring and unfeeling empiric. He disguises from himself his own malignity by assuming the character of a speculator in morals, and one who has the hardihood to realize his speculations.⁴

In the play, Oswald was betrayed into murdering an innocent superior officer of his. Instead of following the typical road of remorse, repentance, etc., he intellectualizes about the murder until he has convinced himself that only through this murder has he gained the new found truths which now govern his life. This type of intellectualizing, and the results of such speculations, we have seen before. In many ways Oswald is like Osorio, Francis, Falkland and the Marquis de Montalt. He tells Marmaduke that murder can be justified through self-interest, which, as he later states, denies a universal morality:

Shall it be law to stab the petty robber
Who aims but at our purse; and shall this Parricide [Herbert]---
Worse he is far, far worse (if foul dishonour
Be worse than death) to that confiding Creature [his daughter]
Whom he to more than filial love and duty
Hath falsely trained---shall he fulfil his purpose? (ll. 894-899)

To Oswald, morality is a master that tyrannizes man and hinders him from discovering the true nature of himself and his relationship to the world about him. After Marmaduke has effectively murdered Herbert, Oswald reveals his amoral independence:

you [Marmaduke] have shown, and by a signal instance,
How they who would be just must seek the rule
By diving for it into their own bosoms.
To-day you have thrown off a tyranny
That lives but in the torpid acquiescence
Of our emasculated souls, the tyranny
Of the world's masters, with the musty rules
By which they uphold their craft from age to age:
You have obeyed the only law that sense
Submits to recognise; the immediate law,

⁴"Preface to The Borderers", pp. 3-5.

From the clear light of circumstances, flashed
 Upon an independent Intellect.
 Henceforth new prospects open on your path;
 Your faculties should grow with the demand. (ll. 1485-98)

The conclusion to such an argument is predictable: "I [Oswald] saw that every possible shape of action/ Might lead to good." (ll. 1780-1) Good in this case is the enlargement of "Man's intellectual empire." (l. 1856)

Coleridge and Wordsworth could only feel antagonistic towards Oswald. His deeds destroy any sympathy one may hold for him. In addition, Coleridge would reject outright the groundwork upon which Oswald builds his optimism. As with Osorio, Oswald has rejected a Christian setting for his foray into independence. Every Christian virtue---charity, mercy, compassion, pity---have been sacrificed to his pride in his intellectual development. But this is not to say that Coleridge did not find certain elements of Oswald's "philosophy" attractive, as did Wordsworth also. In the "Preface to The Borderers," Wordsworth writes of Oswald: "Such a mind cannot but discover some truths, but he is unable to profit by them, and in his hands they become instruments of evil."⁵ Coleridge was as concerned with discovering "truths" as Wordsworth, and, as we have seen, was congenial to the idea of evil leading to such truths. The validity of the situation in The Borderers would repel him, as it repelled Wordsworth, but the basic idea of sin permitting man to escape tyranny would be most interesting, and the destruction of Marmaduke by Oswald would be equally engrossing.

In addition, I think that the motive behind the destruction

⁵"Preface to The Borderers", p. 5.

finds its way into "The Ancient Mariner." In the preface, Wordsworth comments that Oswald makes "the non-existence of a common motive itself a motive to action."⁶ Wordsworth goes on to provide motive for Oswald, specifically in his character; but, from an objective point of view, the situation itself provides no motive. Marmaduke has saved Oswald's life and has sworn friendship. Oswald must intellectualize a motive in order to justify his deception of Marmaduke. A common objectively perceived motive does not exist, but Oswald is firmly convinced of the legitimacy of his motiveless motives. A murder is committed because of something that does not really exist; in fact, two things---the villainy of Herbert, and the falsely reasoned explanations Oswald tries to impress upon Marmaduke. The situation is an intriguing one, and I think Coleridge adopted it when he wrote of the Mariner's crime; but with one important alteration---the motiveless motive had to be sympathized with by the reader.

Marmaduke is described by Wordsworth in the preface as an "amiable young man,"⁷ and Oswald thinks him a naïve "Stripling." (l.1162) Compared to Oswald, Marmaduke is not well endowed intellectually. He is subject to the most facile tales, reasoning, and superstition to which he submits with very little resistance. Oswald finds little trouble in overcoming his "amiability" and any innate morality he may possess. But, significantly, he works on Marmaduke's passions in order to persuade him to kill Herbert. It is only after the murder

⁶"Preface to The Borderers", p. 7.

⁷"Preface to The Borderers", p. 6.

that Oswald feels safe appealing to his intellect. Marmaduke is then almost swayed, but when he realizes that Oswald has betrayed him into murdering an innocent victim, the hollowness of Oswald's philosophy is finally impressed upon him. The truths of Christian mercy and forgiveness become the real truths he learns, and he finally condemns himself to a penance much like that of Cain and the Wandering Jew:

a wanderer must I go,
The Spectre of that innocent Man, my guide.
* * * * *
 over waste and wild,
In search of nothing that this earth can give,
But expiation, will I wander on---
A Man by pain and thought compelled to live,
Yet loathing life---till anger is appeased
In Heaven, and Mercy gives me leave to die. (ll. 2344-53)

Wordsworth is right: Oswald's mind can lead to some truths; but it is the operation of Oswald's mind upon his victim that leads Marmaduke to essential truths.

It is in Marmaduke that Coleridge discovered the germinal seeds of an intellectually inferior man discovering new truths through what is essentially an integral part of his nature, the ability to sin. (This is not to say that Coleridge patterned the Ancient Mariner's sin after the one he had just observed in The Borderers.) It is that strong belief in the inherent depravity in all men which Coleridge wished to reconcile with an equally strong optimistic belief. That man can and does sin, despite wishes to the contrary, was a fact Coleridge could not deny. That he could sin consciously and will positive results was an impossibility, for it denied the Christian moral scheme in which Coleridge believed totally. What "The Ancient Mariner" does

is to present the possibility of sin, a responsible action of man's free will, leading to positive results, while such sin and the results are maintained within a Christian framework. Only a perverted reason, not Milton's Right Reason, can lead a man into sin. The results may be positive in the end but only if the sinner submits to a Christian morality which has been rejected. Coleridge wanted the hero of his poem to be within such a morality at all times, while, paradoxically, breaking the rules of that morality. It is not simply a case of wanting one's cake and eating it too. Coleridge was aware of his manifold sins, but also aware of his complete acceptance of Christian morality. He may have sinned, but he never rejected the validity and existence of such a morality. It is not a case of rejection, or of a perverted will, or of a mental lapse, but is simply the given condition of many individuals. How to put such apparently contradictory thoughts into a poem will be my concern in the next section.

ii "The Ancient Mariner"

The foregoing pages bring us to that small part of "The Ancient Mariner" with which we are primarily concerned, probably the most controversial one and one-half lines of English poetry:

I shot the Albatross,⁸
with my cross bow

In the preceding chapters I have shown how Coleridge's thought was much more orthodox than we would think considering the reverence he felt for Hartley. At the time of composition, his mind was being influenced by two opposing theological arguments---Hartley's benevolent but Necessitarian optimism, as opposed to the Old and New Testament ideas of justice, free will, and the promise of an optimistic benevolent future to those who do not succumb to the depravity which is inherent, to some degree, in all men. And, tempering both these ideas was his own (and others') peculiarly Romantic notion of sin leading to positive results (usually consciously undertaken), typically in the form of self-discovery and discovery of basic universal truths. It is Coleridge's own reconciliation of various diverse philosophies which finds its way into "The Ancient Mariner" and particularly into the Mariner's sin.

⁸Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Ancient Mariner", in Works 1969, ll. 79-80. I will be using the 1798 version of "The Ancient Mariner" which appeared in the first edition of Lyrical Ballads. The revisions Coleridge made to the poem for its publication in Sibylline Leaves (1817), are essentially insignificant for the case I am trying to make, and, since I am concerned with Coleridge's state of mind in 1797-98, it is only logical that I should refer to the poem that he read to the Wordsworths on 23 March 1798.

Before taking a closer look at the Mariner's understated admission, we should first look at his character. Coleridge's comment seems to be the most appropriate place to begin. In the Notebook entry already quoted,⁹ Coleridge warns us that it is a mistake to think that the Mariner is an old man at the time of the sea voyage. Writing quite late in his life, Coleridge thinks him a young man who has told his story at least ten thousand times over a period of fifty years. The poem, of course, gives no indication what age the Mariner may have been. We know that he has told the tale before, many times, but whether for fifty, five or five hundred years is not indicated in the poem. Interestingly, what I think are the best illustrations to the poem, those of Gustave Doré reproduced in Martin Gardner's The Annotated Ancient Mariner, portray the Mariner as a young, curly headed "Stripling" who, by the time he reaches his native land, has aged approximately twenty years and grown a remarkably "old" looking beard. I, myself, find it difficult to think of the Mariner as young. The reader is so transported into the tale that he automatically takes the ancient narrator with him and imagines an ancient "grey-beard Loon" aiming a cross-bow towards the heavens. And, notably, there is nothing in the poem to distract us from this conception.

But, of course, the Mariner must have been somewhat younger during the voyage than he is now. In Part V, the Mariner works the ropes with the body of his "brother's son." (l. 333) One would naturally think of brothers being approximately the same age. In this case, the Mariner's brother would be at least thirty-five or forty years

⁹See above, p. 59.

of age in order to have a son, who would be at least sixteen, working the rigging of an ocean-going ship. Of course, there is no proof that the Mariner was not twenty years his brother's junior, but it is unlikely. What I am trying to indicate is that the Mariner is not in his early youth but is an experienced seaman. He has dropped "below the Kirk" and merrily sailed into the boundless seas on numerous occasions.

A better known comment on the Mariner's character was penned by William Wordsworth in a note attached to the preface to Lyrical Ballads 1800: "the principal person [the Mariner] has no distinct character, either in his profession of Mariner, or as a human being who having been long under the controul of supernatural impressions might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural: . . . he does not act, but is continually acted upon."¹⁰ Lowes points out that the comment is decidedly ungenerous. There is no indication in the poem that the Mariner does not fulfill the contract of his profession. The Mariner actually is careful to refrain from distinguishing himself from the other seamen. In the first part of the poem, he consistently speaks of "we" or the "Marineres," until he finally singles himself out so dramatically. Perhaps it is this about which Wordsworth complains. But surely there is a reason behind such a development of character. The Mariner is alike his comrades in every respect except one. That one difference delineates the Mariner extremely sharply. He kills a bird upon which the rest of the crew,

¹⁰William Wordsworth, Lyrical Ballads 1800, Vol. I, unnumbered page after the text; quoted in Lowes, p. 475n.

and even he, were depending as a sign of good luck. Before delving into the implications of such a deed we will first examine Wordsworth's second and third objections.

The second needs little comment. I imagine Wordsworth's concern with sales and critical reaction blinded him to the frame surrounding the Mariner's story. The control the Mariner is able to exercise over the wedding-guest surely suggests something other than earthly, non-supernatural power. And, surely, the agony of telling the tale over and over again, it being wrenched out of him by unknown forces, suggests to some extent that the Mariner partakes of the supernatural.

The third objection is likewise rather unthinkingly written. As Lowes points out constantly, it is necessary to read between the lines of the poem, at least where the actual movement of the ship is concerned. The crew would have spent at least two months and probably more sailing to the southern tip of South America. We cannot assume for a minute that the Mariner sat back and allowed the "Storm and Wind" to drive the ship some three or four thousand miles while the rest of the crew, especially the helmsman, must have worked night and day. The Mariner, of course, does act in three notable places: he kills the Albatross, he signals the approach of the Spectre-ship, and he blesses the water snakes. But he acts in other places also. In Part IV, he looks to Heaven and tries unsuccessfully to pray. In Part V, he notices and partakes of the natural beauty surrounding him--the lights in the masts, the wind, the stars,

the moon, the clouds, and the lightning. He works the sails with his dead comrades. And finally, in Part VII, he rows the terrified Pilot, boy and Hermit to shore. In other words, the Mariner, despite his experience, has not been rendered a lifeless form who is possessed of some strange tale. He is a human being who has gone through an unusual experience; but, he is still part of the temporal world and is able to operate within it.

The Mariner is, or at least was at the time of his adventure, an ordinary man in all respects except one—he singles himself out as the killer of an Albatross which his two hundred comrades would not dream of slaying. We are compelled to ask—why? Critical answers over the last fifty years have been more or less standard, most stressing the lack of motivation behind the crime. Lowes considers the act trivial.¹¹ Knight thinks it "an act of unmotivated and wanton, semi-sadistic, destruction."¹² House sees it as a "ghastly violation of a great sanctity, at least as bad as a murder."¹³ C. M. Bowra sees the deed as a "hideous crime" when "in a fit of irritation or anger the Mariner shoots the albatross."¹⁴ Other descriptions abound: "impulsive,"¹⁵ "thoughtless,"¹⁶ an act of "gratuitous

¹¹Lowes, p. 277.

¹²Knight, p. 159.

¹³House, p. 180.

¹⁴C. M. Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 57.

¹⁵Gingerich, p. 17.

¹⁶W. J. Bate, Coleridge (Toronto: MacMillan, 1968), p. 57.

wickedness,"¹⁷ "unconcerned,"¹⁸ and "dreadful."¹⁹ Warren refuses to attach an adjective of moral judgement to the murder, and, instead, considers it symbolic of a violation of the "One Life" principle.²⁰ Hartman also refuses to judge the motives behind the deed, saying it is "purified of all extrinsic causes, even of possible motive."²¹ But, he does go on to say that the act ~~leads~~ the Mariner to the Jungian state of individuation.

Harold Bloom comments further on such an idea. He admits that the slaying is without "apparent premeditation or conscious motive," but, after citing a tradition of "violence that confirms individual existence and so averts an absolute despair of self" in literature, goes on to say that the Mariner's crime is a "desperate assertion of self and a craving for a heightened sense of identity."²² Bloom recognizes two basic traits in human nature, the existence of which, I think, Coleridge would admit: man's innate curiosity, and the impossibility of there being no motive behind any human action. Coleridge would recognize the invalidity of a motiveless crime, for the reader's automatic and spontaneous reaction to it would be to

¹⁷Brett, p. 99.

¹⁸Beer, p. 149.

¹⁹D. W. Harding, "Guilt and Isolation", from "The Theme of 'The Ancient Mariner'", Scrutiny, IX (March, 1941), 334-342, in Royal A. Gettmann, ed., "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner": A Handbook (San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1961), p. 78.

²⁰Warren, pp. 77-86.

²¹Hartman, p. 132.

²²Bloom, p. 202.

look for motives. Satan's fall in Paradise Lost was prompted by pride and Eve's by a desire for superior knowledge. Even Iago is motivated by jealousy and a desire for power.²³

Even Wordsworth in his "Preface to The Borderers," after discussing "the non-existence of a common motive itself a motive to action,"²⁴ lists the motives behind Oswald's behaviour, beginning with pride and ending with his perverted reason. Wordsworth says these motives are "founded chiefly on the very constitution of his character."²⁵ It is here that the seemingly unmotivated crime finds its ultimate motivation. In essence, all crime has motivation if point of view and character are considered in addition to situation.

Coleridge's source for the Mariner's crime, Shelvocke's narration of Captain Hatley shooting a "disconsolate black Albitross," does emphasize motivation:

Hatley, (my second Captain) observing, in one of his melancholy fits, that this bird was always hovering near us, imagin'd, from his colour, that it might be some ill omen. That which, I suppose, induced him the more to encourage his superstition, was the continued series of contrary tempestuous winds, which had oppress'd us ever since we had got into this sea. But be that as it would, he, after some fruitless attempts, at length, shot the Albitross,

²³In his criticism of Othello, Coleridge describes a soliloquy by Iago as "the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity." ("Notes On Othello", in Shedd, IV, 181.) As the audience knows, Iago does not have a motive. Othello trusts him completely and Iago could not be better off. But as Coleridge admits, Iago does have motive from his own point of view; he possesses a "dread of contempt habitual to those, who encourage in themselves, and have their keenest pleasure in, the expression of contempt for others," and a "disappointed vanity and envy," vices which predispose him towards sin (Shedd, IV, 178.).

²⁴"Preface to The Borderers", p. 7.

²⁵"Preface to The Borderers", p. 7.

not doubting (perhaps) that we should have a fair wind after it.²⁶

The motive is entirely believable. Hatley feels that the ship has been tossed about unnecessarily for the past few days, and, seizing upon the immediate motive of superstition, reveals his real motive, namely, irritation at the helpless condition of the ship. The albatross, which unfortunately is the wrong colour, falls victim to Captain Hatley's melancholy mood. Coleridge, departing from his source somewhat, is careful to remove all obvious sources of motivation for the Mariner's shooting. If anything, the Albatross relieves the daily monotony of sailing through ice and snow, and, although superstitiously, the mariners welcome it in a positive frame of mind.

That Coleridge would remove all motive is difficult to accept.²⁷ Both he and Wordsworth, while perhaps envisaging motiveless crime, were not satisfied until they had delved further into particular characters and had discovered personality traits that adequately explained motive, at least from the criminal's point of view. It is within human nature to question almost instinctively all action

²⁶ Capt. George Shelvocke, A Voyage round the World By the Way of the Great South Sea (London, 1726), pp. 72-73; quoted in Lowes, p. 206.

²⁷ In the Notebooks, II, Entry 2090; May 1804, Coleridge, on his trip to Malta, describes the appearance of a hawk on the ship: Hawk with ruffled Feathers resting on the Bowsprit—Now shot at & yet did not move—how fatigued—a third time it made a gyre, a short circuit, & returned again/ 5 times it was thus shot at/ left the Vessel/ flew to another/ & I heard firing, now here, now there/ & nobody shot it/ but probably it perished from fatigue, & the attempt to rest upon the wave!—Poor Hawk! O Strange Lust of Murder in Man!—It is not cruelty/ it is mere non-feeling from non-thinking. Many critics have pointed out the relationship this incident seems to have to "The Ancient Mariner." Significantly, we see a motive present for the shooting, namely, boredom, probably the same motive as that of Captain Hatley.

in terms of motive. We naturally ask why, from age two years to extreme old age. If Coleridge had provided a motive, it is likely that many readers would question the motive given (whether it is in character or not, whether it fits the crime, and so on). Part of the reader's mind would remain puzzling out Coleridge's purposes in the first part of the poem, while the other part of the mind would half-heartedly become involved in the Mariner's experience. Coleridge's purpose in writing the poem as it has come down to us would thus be destroyed. Only the whole mind can willingly suspend its disbelief. So, Coleridge decided to eliminate all statement of motive, knowing full well that the reader almost unconsciously would supply his own in a fraction of a second and be able to continue with Part II with all his poetic faith intact.

The above critical opinions on the slaying (except for those of Hartman and Bloom) refer only to motive arising out of character, and these, of course, are only surmises, the Mariner having demonstrated no ability to act in this manner up to this point. In fact, most of the critics think of the crime as unmotivated. If Coleridge constructed the crime as I have suggested, it seems probable that he would leave clues as to possible motive that only the critical eye, which has regained its disbelief, would observe. And, if the motive is not to be found in character traits, we must turn towards situation to discover what would prompt the Mariner to kill an Albatross which is far from disconsolate and not referred to as being coloured black.

Given the situation of a ship, a crew of two hundred sailors, foul weather, a bird, and our narrator Mariner, there seem to be only

these five things which could provide motive. The ship may be immediately eliminated. It receives mention only to establish that the events of the poem take place on the sea. Turning first to the Mariner, and ignoring inherent personality traits such as misdirected envy or pride, we may speculate that the Mariner kills the Albatross because, perhaps, he dislikes the crew for some reason and makes apparent his dislike by killing their good luck charm. Perhaps, as in Shelvocke, he simply dislikes birds and finally becomes irritated enough with this one to shoot it. And, perhaps, as Bloom suggests, he feels a desire to assert his own identity by violating established codes, having felt its loss for some reason. These speculations are essentially meaningless, for neither the poem nor Coleridge's other writings confirm such motivation. But at the same time, Coleridge's state of mind in 1797-98, which would be reflected in the poem, suggests that the above three elements are involved in the motivation behind the crime in some way. Just how they are involved will be seen if we turn to the other three items that could provide the Mariner with reason for killing the Albatross.

For all intents and purposes, the world of the Mariner consists of only the ship, the sea, his companions and a bird. These sailors are humanity, all of humanity. He has seen only them for at least two months and would expect to see no other human beings for at least two years (if the purpose of the voyage was to encircle the globe). If we place the Mariner in a Necessitarian world, as Gingerich has done, his fellows and he must be operating within Hartley's system. None has the power to alter circumstances surrounding them. Each will

react according to the pleasure -- pain principle, and none will question whatever is put before them, for all circumstances are part of a mechanistic, optimistic benevolent pattern. All will submit to an unalterable environment and try to derive pleasure, or the least amount of pain, from all experience.

Coleridge develops such a mechanistic universe in the first part of "The Ancient Mariner." There is absolutely nothing in the ship's embarking and the initial stages of its voyage that suggest anything but total control:

The Ship was cheer'd, the Harbour clear'd---
Merrily did we drop
Below the Kirk, below the Hill,
Below the Light-house top.

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.

Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon. (ll. 25-34)

Coleridge uses the word "drop" in the first stanza. The ship does not sail; rather it drops over the horizon. The point of view is of one standing on land, not on board ship, watching something disappear and having no control over its disappearance.²⁸ Coleridge pointedly personifies the sun, and, at the same time, destroys every potential

²⁸R. C. Bald, in his "Coleridge and The Ancient Mariner: Addenda to The Road to Xanadu", in H. Davis, W. C. DeVane, and R. C. Bald, eds., Nineteenth-Century Studies (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 10, comments on Coleridge's awareness of sea and land perspective. He quotes Coleridge from Sibylline Leaves, p. 9: "In the former edition the line was, 'The furrow follow'd free;' but I had not been long on board a ship, before I perceived that this was the image as seen by a spectator from the shore, or from another vessel." Therefore, Coleridge probably left alone intentionally "Merrily did we drop/ Below the Kirk."

personification may hold for the poet. There is no character associated with the personified sun. No relationship to man is established through its humanization, except one---its operations are mechanistic. It rises, follows a course, and sets, always in the same direction. In fact, this second stanza seems to be one of the most purposeless in the poem except for this factor and one other---we are made aware that the ship is sailing south.

The description of the storm which accosts the mariners south of the equator is handled similarly. Rather than weathering the storm or opposing it by attempting to reach land, the ship is driven along like "chaff" in a wind, driven for at least three thousand miles. The ship and its crew do not simply experience inclement weather, the tempest controls them: "For days and weeks it play'd us freaks." (l. 47)

Once in the southern extremities of the Atlantic, the ship is again controlled by the elements, this time by icebergs. The Mariner can make no comment on the dangers of sailing through ice. In fact, all he can do is describe what his senses perceive:

The Ice was here, the Ice was there,
The Ice was all around:
It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd---
Like noises of a swound. (ll. 57-60)

The ice takes on a character of its own with appropriate noises, and hems in the ship. The crew seems helpless to do anything but submit to external forces.

It is only after the Albatross arrives that we see the crew undertake an action that could be considered independent of external

causes, namely the steering of the ship to freedom through the last great ice-flow. But, again, Coleridge is careful to associate even this action with external causes. The Albatross appears as if it were a "Christian Soul," and adopts the ship. As soon as the Mariners hail it in "God's name," they are suddenly freed from the dangers of the ice. The Helmsman must steer them to calmer seas, but the ice appears to split and permit escape only because of the appearance of the Albatross.

Even the form of the poem contributes to the feeling of Necessity. The rhythmical ballad, unlike prose or blank verse, moves almost mechanically. Event after event occurs within a verse pattern that changes only slightly. The order of events is most always chronological; a person or a thing is followed through a certain period of his or its life. The Mariner leaves his native land in the seventh stanza, sails south in the eighth, and reaches the equator in the ninth. The voyage is then interrupted, but not by something within the tale. Coleridge only re-establishes the fact that it is a tale being told by an old man with a glittering eye. And, abruptly, the tale begins again, exactly where it left off; a storm drives them to the extreme south Atlantic and so forth. The narrative itself is unbroken by flashbacks or parallel development elsewhere, or even the plottings of the Polar Spirit. We are dealing with the Ancient Mariner and our eyes do not leave him. The tale is told as factual history, not as embroidered fiction. And Coleridge uses this technique to full advantage. We cannot for a moment imagine that the control which the ballad form exercises over us, the reader, is also

exercised over the crew and Nature. We are watching history unfold, as through the eye of a camera, but a director is not controlling the action. It is pure documentary, a simple recording of events that did happen in such a sequence.

The Mariner's companions apparently have done nothing which could offend the Mariner personally. In fact, they seem to be bogged down in Wordsworth's inaction at times. But, I think it is precisely this inaction that does prompt the Mariner to action. He has seen himself driven three thousand miles off course by a storm, threatened by icebergs, and finally saved by a bird. His companions have accepted such submission to externals as a matter of course, and so does the Mariner, for he also hails the bird in "God's name." But, in two subsequent, rather ambiguous, lines, the Mariner describes his comrades feeding and calling to the Albatross while he seems to exclude himself from such behaviour. The use of the pronoun "we" has been consistent up to the line "We hail'd it in God's name." (l. 64) This is abruptly replaced by the third person "the Mariners," except for line 68 where the ship is steered through the ice. Both uses of the third person refer to the Albatross. The Mariner's first response is to welcome a good luck charm after the terrors he has been through, but his attitude appears to change. He recognizes such behaviour for what it really is--a denial of self and the power the self has over its environment; and, thus, he divorces himself from all action concerning the Albatross. As Bloom states, the Mariner discovers motivation for his deed in his desire for self-assertion, a desire to prove that his existence is not completely controlled by external factors, that he is not merely a

minute cog in the great wheel of Nature.

Before examining the Mariner more carefully, we must first turn our attention to the Albatross. Does the Albatross itself provide the Mariner with motivation for his crime? On a literal level the question becomes absurd. The Albatross is simply a hungry bird looking for food in a part of the sea which probably has not produced any lately because of unsuitable weather. The mariners are willing to keep its stomach well supplied, so it is willing to stay. Thus, if motivation is to be found, we must look at the crew's treatment of the bird.

The mariners' reaction to the arrival of the Albatross is in some ways surprising, although, considering their perilous situation, not really so. The Ancient Mariner uses a harmless enough simile in describing the bird: "And an it were a Christian Soul." (l. 63) The ship's crew, of course, is composed entirely of Christians, and it is reasonable to imagine a Christian, as opposed to a pagan bird landing on the deck, the mariners greeting it as if it were someone like themselves. But, the next line, "We hail'd it in God's name," adds a special quality to the bird that normally would not be assumed. As it stands, the line suggests that the crew welcomes the Albatross on board much the same as they would welcome a priest or any human representative of God. It is fed and treated as a sign from God that the mariners have not been forsaken. Abruptly the ship breaks through the ice into much better weather. God's will and infinite power are discovered through nature as well as through Scripture.

Following their release from the ice, the crew treats the

Albatross as one would expect; it is made a pet:

And a good south wind sprung up behind,
 The Albatross did follow;
 And every day for food or play
 Came to the Marinere's hollo! (ll. 69-72)

At least it appears to be a pet during the day. In the evening there are suggestions that it takes on a slightly different significance, which is made most clear in the following stanza:

In mist or cloud on mast or shroud,
 It perch'd for vespers nine,
 Whiles all the night thro' fog smoke-white,
 Glimmer'd the white moon-shine. (ll. 73-76)

Instead of playing or eating, the Albatross invariably ascends to the rigging during the evening religious service, in full view of the sailors. The Mariner is most careful to mention that it perches above the sailors, in the same manner that the alter in a church is always raised above the congregation. And, most interesting is the placing of the last two lines of the stanza dealing with the moon, which follow immediately two lines dealing with a religious service and an Albatross. As Coleridge would undoubtedly know, most, if not all, pagan religions had for their primary deities, the moon and sun. Earthly representations of both were usual and were considered to possess aspects of the divine.

More to the point is Coleridge's attack against superstition, the worship of idols which was dealt with in Chapter I. To see the Albatross as an idol would be reading too much into the poem. Although Coleridge refers to idolatry on numerous occasions we cannot think of the Albatross as being a "grisly Idol," or an image. The mariners do not worship it, despite its positioning in the rigging of the ship. Rather, they treat it superstitiously. In a statement that has some

bearing on the Albatross, Appleyard summarizes the main content of "Religious Musings": "The only obstacle to the individual's happiness is superstition, or ignorance of God as Supreme Reality, which only Faith can overcome."²⁹ As is pointedly remarked in the second part of "The Ancient Mariner," the crew is overcome by superstition. As long as the bird is hailed in God's name, benevolence follows the mariners. As soon as God is ignored and the Albatross is considered to be the instigator of favourable weather, the benevolence suddenly ceases. The mariners no longer look to God as Supreme Reality. Rather, it is the Albatross which controls their fortunes. Their condemnation of the Mariner in Part II for slaying the charm that has delivered them from the ice and snow is the end result of a process that began immediately the Helmsman steered them through.

The fact that the crew act superstitiously towards the Albatross would not, I think, provide the Mariner with motive for slaying it. But, the fact that such superstition is simply another facet of submitting to a blind Necessity would provide motivation. The crew has silently undergone the torments of being blown three thousand miles off course and the resultant dangers of mist and ice. They just as blandly accept the fortuitous breaking up of the ice, not as a natural phenomenon, but as the act of some controlling force. Being overcome by superstition is only the next step toward complete denial of the individual's ability to alter events or to control one's environment. Coleridge states in the fourth of the autobiographical letters addressed

²⁹Appleyard, p. 40.

to Thomas Poole: "I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief."³⁰ This is precisely what the crew does. Their senses detect dangerous weather and their belief centres upon a mysterious control in whose grips they are locked. Good weather follows a fortuitous meeting with a hungry Albatross, and immediately it becomes the controlling factor in their lives.

This enslavement to sense data is made most clear in Part II. Upon the slaying, the Mariner is promptly condemned:

For all averr'd, I had kill'd the Bird
That made the Breeze to blow. (ll. 91-92)

In the next stanza, the mariners completely reverse their stance, for now the emergence of the sun has changed their sense data patterns:

Ne dim ne red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averr'd, I had kill'd the Bird
That brought the fog and mist.
Twas right, said they, such birds to slay
That bring the fog and mist. (ll. 93-98)

As the sun continues to shine, sense data information alters belief once again; the Mariner is again condemned and the Albatross is hung about his neck. As Appleyard suggests, God is no longer the Supreme Reality, at least as far as concern for self is considered. An Albatross is responsible solely for the fortunes of the ship and its crew. This is precisely the danger of Christian mechanistic philosophies such as Hartley's. Once one becomes involved in the inevitability of a pre-established chain of cause and effect, the fact that God benevolently authors all such events can easily be lost

³⁰Letters, I, 354; [16 October 1797].

from sight. The emphasis in such a philosophy, despite Hartley's disagreement, is upon the temporal aspects of predetermined behaviour and the earthly causes of such behaviour. The mystery is removed from God and from the future or the results of actions. The only mystery that remains is temporal cause; in effect, a denial or ignoring of God. It is this that irritates the Mariner and provokes him to slay what to the reader is a harmless bird.

We must now turn to the Mariner himself to discover what in his character would prompt him to respond to such motivation in the way he does. We have already seen that to call the Mariner a naïve youth who wantonly destroys a bird in order to "fill out the moment"³¹ is a mistake. He is probably middle aged and is an experienced seaman. He is undoubtedly superstitious, at least to some extent, for he also hails the bird in God's name; but he also questions such superstition. What kind of character would he be to "inhospitably killeth the pious bird of good omen"? Given the conditions already mentioned, how would Coleridge conceive of such a character?

Many critics, most notably Gingerich, see the Mariner acting under the influence of Hartley's Necessity. A close look at the nature of the Mariner's relationship to the Albatross and his rather perilous situation at sea ought to dispel such a notion. Hartley specifically states that man pursues pleasure and tries to avoid pain. Pain or sin do result often, but, such pain always leads to good, that is, to a future pleasure. For the Mariner to put his life and the crew's in

³¹Bate, p. 60.

serious danger, especially considering his experience at sea, is a ridiculous notion. The sailors have experienced enough pain already during the voyage, and no one, particularly a knowledgeable sailor, could wish for any more. As for the Mariner's relationship to the Albatross, the slaying of it, considering that it is a sign or even worker of good luck, would violate Hartley's principle which states that there is no such thing as philosophical free will. The Mariner is faced with the possibility of A (submitting to the Albatross) and a (killing the Albatross). In effect, the circumstances are the same in both cases. Everything points towards not killing the Albatross, including all twenty years or so of the Mariner's experience at sea. The Mariner does not desire or will to kill the bird because of the development of past associations of ideas, but he commits the crime in any case.

Why he shoots the Albatross must be linked with free will, the power to choose between two opposing actions independent of past associations, which, as we have seen, Coleridge was not reluctant to accept. Coleridge could not agree with Hartley's premise that man of necessity is led to virtuous action. Man must consciously work towards that goal by animating his sense of virtue, most typically through the knowledge of evil. Likewise, some individuals consciously will depravity and actually move further and further away from ultimate benevolence, rather than learning from association and, hence, moving towards the virtuous life. Only God's grace in the form of divine revelation will prevent such a man from achieving total degeneration, an element outside Hartley's optimistic framework. In the Mariner's

case, the choice is between submission to a system that denies his self, his identity, and rejection of such a system, although the consequences may be severe. It is not a question of a conditioned response on the Mariner's part. Rather, a momentous decision is made unconsciously, almost intuitively, at the moment of the deed.

What, then, would prompt the Mariner to turn towards a criminal act in order to assert his selfhood, or, more to the point, why would Coleridge conceive of his central figure committing a crime rather than discovering his identity through more legitimate, virtuous means? Primarily, the answer is tied up with Coleridge being a central figure in the European Romantic movement and subject to the same interests as most other writers. As we have seen, most major writers of the 1790's were concerned with sin, particularly the notion of sin leading to good and leading to new found truths. The writers mentioned above could only conceive of such an idea in a tragic sense--good and truth may result but the protagonist comes to a tragic end, whether it be death or the virtual annihilation of all future happiness. In keeping with the tragic mode, the various authors could deal only with characters of superior rank and intellectual capabilities. Even Wordsworth's Marmaduke fits this pattern except that he is deficient in his knowledge of others.

Coleridge wrote two similar tragedies, Osorio, and The Fall of Robespierre in which he collaborated with Southey. As I have mentioned, "The Ancient Mariner" is also an investigation of such sin, but from a different point of view. The hero is not an intellectually superior being. He is an uneducated experienced sailor who undoubtedly

relies on instinct or intuition for survival. Such men distrust reason as a condition for action, usually because they are incapable of such reasoning, but, also because it too often involves unnecessary factors and leads to wrong decisions. The Mariner may be naïve where intellect is involved, but his intuitive sense is strong and dependable. Accompanying these characteristics is a strong faith in God. While the other mariners so easily turn from God to the Albatross, the Mariner's faith holds strong, even during the worst of his trials. He may say "that God himself/ Scarce seemed there to be," (ll. 632-633) but he carefully qualifies the phrase. At least once he tries to pray, and his appeal to Christ in Part IV signifies an unflagging faith in God, the Supreme Reality. The Mariner is a new entrant into the literary ring of positive sinners.

We have also seen that Coleridge, along with most other writers, had been toying with the idea of conscious sinning, or at least, sinning outside a Necessitarian framework which leads to a positive gain: "Our evil Passions, under the influence of Religion, become innocent, and may be made to animate our virtue."³² By March 1798, Coleridge firmly believed that a knowledge of sin was necessary if virtue was to possess a solid validity. From Godwin he learned that the discovery and propagation of truth were two of man's basic duties; and from Schiller and Wordsworth the idea of sin leading to essential truths suggested itself.

But, lurking behind these optimistic notions is the fundamental

³² Works (1969), p. 112n.

Christian idea that all sin demands punishment. In an ultimate sense, sin could prove to be innocent, but, at the time of committing it could not go unheeded. Coleridge was also influenced strongly by the possibility of depravity being inherent, particularly in figures who either relied exclusively on their passions or who turned from God to reason as sole reality. The problem was to discover a character who could fulfill Coleridge's optimistic desires, and, at the same time, avoid the various pitfalls that would place his central character in an unsympathetic light.

The Ancient Mariner is such a character and his story is such a tale of the positive results of sin. He is a figure who could not possibly be guided by reason or passions exclusively. He is unable to deal with disliked circumstances surrounding him in a positive virtuous manner, partly because of naivety, but also because he does not fully comprehend his situation. His intellectual capacity is such that any thought on his condition would only confuse. Rather, he must rely on a highly tuned intuitive sense which, in effect, tells him that now, the moment before the slaying, may be his last opportunity to extricate himself from the mechanical world of his comrades where superstition reigns. Perhaps out of frustration, perhaps in desperation, definitely in complete ignorance of the consequences, he slays the most threatening object to his selfhood, the Albatross.

Although certainly not symbolic of, the action is closely akin to the Wandering Jew's insult to Christ, or to Cain's murder of Abel, or to Charles' turning to the life of an outlaw. It is the most

obvious and most accessible means of combatting something that poses a threat. But, there is a major difference between these characters and the Mariner. They react, sin by violating a moral truth, and accidentally discover the validity of this truth. The Mariner reacts against 'non-truth', that is Necessity, by violating a moral truth. While opposing one truth he is affirming another, and, in effect, discovers two truths through his sin. The crime is as positive as it is negative. His intuition tells him that something must be done or selfhood is lost. Intuitively he slays the bird, a crime against a truth as the moral explicitly tells us, and, unconsciously he knows that although the deed is a sin and there is much to be lost, that is, pain will result, also much will be gained, that is, he will achieve selfhood despite future events. He will have resisted mechanistic forces which are causing him to turn away from God, and, instead, will have asserted his absolute faith in God and in God's laws.

Paradoxically, he finds it necessary to break one of God's laws, namely Warren's "One Life" law, in order to achieve a proper relationship with God and His universe. And, ironically, the reader knows that the crime did not have to be committed. It is the crew that has deceived itself into thinking that the universe is controlled by Necessity. In reality it is not, as the Mariner discovers, and "all this pothor about a bird" becomes simply pothor.³³ The Mariner, who is completely unaware, is dealing with a state of mind and not external events. A mental rejection of Necessity and superstition

³³Leslie Stephen, Hours in a Library; quoted in Warren, p. 82.

was all that was needed, and if his faith had been strong enough, the proper relationship to God would have been established. The Mariner's motiveless motive is completely sympathized with as is his naïvety. On the contrary, Oswald's, from which as I suggested Coleridge drew the idea, is not. His motive did not arise out of innocence and must be condemned therefore.

One-half of this relationship is plainly stated in the moral of Part VII:

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

He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small:
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all. (ll. 645-650)

Albatrosses should be loved, as should one's fellow man, and not be slaughtered. If this rule is broken punishment invariably follows. But, contained within this moral is a less conspicuous dictate—man must love and respect his own being. Coleridge rejected much of Hartley, but there was also much he could not reject, namely, Hartley's basic optimism and the one major premise upon which he bases his optimism—"Rational Self-interest, or the Pursuit of such Things, as are believed to be the Means for obtaining our greatest possible Happiness."³⁴ The "greatest possible Happiness" includes an understanding of the self and the relation of the self to God. Man must discover the basic truths of his existence if he is to be able to love God as God loves man. The Mariner discovers that anything other than

³⁴Hartley, II, 271.

love of God and submission to God's love, which can only be achieved by recognition of the self's power to generate that love and respond to God's love within a moral framework, leads to an ultimate rejection of God.

This is not to deny that the Mariner has sinned. Despite the value of the experience he must be punished. By discovering one truth he has violated another of which he must be made aware. J. B. Beer points out that "the whole weight of the poem suggests that if he [the Mariner] had had any idea of the significance of his action, he would have refrained."³⁵ But, intuition does not allow for consequences. The Mariner knew intuitively or unconsciously that he would suffer a spiritual death if he did not act immediately. To avoid such a death he chose an action that, despite its consequences, would establish meaning in his existence and reinforce an unconscious desire to place himself within a proper relationship to God. The consequences of his action prove to be almost self-defeating; for in slaying the Albatross he violates a Christian principle that is almost as important as self-love. This plunges him into a situation that threatens a spiritual as well as a physical death. But, by rejecting the greater sin of outright rejection of God, he survives the punishment resulting from the lesser. It is precisely for this reason that he lives and his two hundred comrades die.

That the Mariner recognizes and understands this process is unlikely. He is incapable of explaining the violation of the "One

³⁵Beer, p. 149.

Life" theme in the poem, except by relating his tale and adding a rather simplistic moral to the end of it. But, he does realize he has learned or discovered basic truths which, in Godwinian terms, must be propagated. He does not simply tell his tale, he teaches it (l. 623) to usually unwilling listeners who learn and become sadder and wiser men (l. 657). That such a six line moral, or even the extremely dramatic story of an uncharitable act which leads to a discovery of charity and love, would have such a profound effect upon the wedding-guest is unlikely. What does affect him is the knowledge that self-assertion leading to vital self-knowledge and knowledge of man's true relationship to God involves a seemingly insupportable amount of pain and suffering at times, and involves a constant struggle to maintain a faith in God who, in a fallen world, does not operate the way one would like Him to operate.

iii Conclusion

Geoffrey Hartman comments that the Mariner's act is a "founding gesture, a caesura dividing stages of being." It is a step towards the Jungian state of individuation.³⁶ Most clearly, the Mariner has projected himself into a new state of being, renouncing a blind submission to a Necessitarian universe. Rather than denying the self, or seeing the self as an insignificant particle within an overwhelming, incomprehensible universe, the Mariner, by killing the Albatross, makes himself the centre of his environment. In Jung's terms he gathers the world to himself.³⁷ His act of self-assertion is the focal point in the poem and every event following derives meaning from it. He has sinned and must undergo a punishment and penance dealt out by the polar spirit. He has also rejected a false vision of the universe and replaced it with a true vision with himself and his relationship to God at the centre. For this new state of mind he must receive confirmation, which he does—he lives and returns to his native land under the protection of a host of angelic forms.

As I have mentioned, the Mariner does not completely understand what has happened to him, or the significance of his nightmarish voyage. He does realize that he has been singled out for some purpose, but for what he is not totally aware; hence, the stress on the simplistic moral in Part VII. He senses (rather than knows) that his experience

³⁶ See above, p. 48.

³⁷ See above, p. 48n.

must be revealed, but, he is not able to say how or to whom; hence, he can only describe the tale as being wrenched out of him agonizingly. We can see in the Mariner a blend of the conscious and the unconscious. He is quite conscious of his new-found relationship to God and the universe, and, he seems to possess an unconscious awareness of the significance of his adventure and the necessity to reveal it. He is at the same time, a figure resembling the epic hero, and also, the inimitable Ancient Mariner, relying on intuition and the unconscious in place of an intellect he does not possess.

Joseph Campbell, in his The Hero With a Thousand Faces, makes a most interesting comment upon the mission of the epic hero returning from his adventure, an adventure that some critics claim the Mariner to have undergone.³⁸ The hero who returns is "blessed with a vision transcending the scope of normal human destiny, and amounting to a glimpse of the essential nature of the cosmos. Not his personal fate, but the fate of mankind, of life as a whole . . . has been opened to him; and this in terms befitting his human understanding."³⁹ His

³⁸At least three studies comparing "The Ancient Mariner" to an epic heroic adventure have been made: J. D. Boulger, "Christian Skepticism in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", in F. W. Hilles and H. Bloom, eds., From Sensibility to Romanticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 439-452; Karl Kroeber, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner as Stylized Epic", Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, XLVI (1957), 179-187; and Mark Littmann, "The Ancient Mariner and Initiation Rites", Papers on Language and Literature, IV (1968), 370-389. Campbell traces the route of the hero from the call to adventure to eventual return, not mentioning Coleridge's poem. The parallels with the Mariner's journey are numerous and striking, but a work of substantial length would be needed to deal with them satisfactorily.

³⁹Joseph Campbell, The Hero With a Thousand Faces (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961), p. 234.

mission is to reveal this truth to a world not prepared to listen or even completely understand.⁴⁰ The world of the Mariner's comrades and of the wedding-guest is that world of normal human destiny, a world where true spiritualness, complete faith in and love of God, takes second place to temporal considerations. It becomes the Mariner's duty, almost fate, to reveal his vision to an unwilling world. It is a vision he only partially understands, and, therefore, the most direct method of teaching is to relate the vision exactly as it occurred which allows the listener to derive meaning from the tale. The Mariner is secure enough in his belief and so positively sure of the truthfulness of his vision that he submits himself to God's will and becomes a figure like Percy's Wandering Jew, teaching his twofold moral. This most unlikely hero has been granted a cosmic vision that is only given to a few and can only be revealed to a limited number of people. The Mariner's vision and new-found self-knowledge result from a combination of chance and of an intuitively motivated freedom of the will. Only such a figure as the Ancient Mariner could successfully violate divine law, and, only such a figure could produce that peculiarly Romantic, tragically optimistic keynote at the end of the poem in the person of the wedding-guest:

He went, like one that hath been stunn'd
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man
He rose the morrow morn. (ll. 655-658)

⁴⁰Campbell, p. 218.

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