

In any case, the spiritual truth of the poem resides less in the two explicit stanzas² with which, save two, it concludes (stanzas whose social humanity seems to me to save them completely from the reproach that moral tags deserve) than in the implicit allegory attaching to the parallel sets of symbols consisting of the Sun and the Moon, the Polar Spirit and the Hermit, the First Voice and the Second Voice. For Mrs. Barbauld, says Professor Lowes,

even in the Mariner's valedictory piety, which does, I fear, warrant Coleridge's (and our own) regret, the moral sentiment was not obtruded openly enough. Had the Mariner shot a shipmate instead of an albatross, she would have understood—and there would have been no *Ancient Mariner*. . . . A tale the inalienable charm of which (as Coleridge himself perceived) lies in its kinship with the immortal fictions of *The Arabian Nights*, becomes, so motivated, a grotesque and unintelligible caricature of tragedy.³

Now although Professor Lowes is altogether right in thus preferring bird to man as the victim of the Mariner's crossbow, he appears to attach too much importance to the concrete symbol here, despite his convincing explorations of the psychological history of the Albatross within the poet's mind. The prime value of the incident is to make manifest the Mariner's spiritual sickness and his need of redemption. The destruction of the Albatross, indeed, is less a needless crime than a revealed diathesis. The central and critical symbols are those named above.

My thesis is, briefly (and this is but a brief paper), that the Ancient Mariner—who is at once himself, Coleridge and

²"The gentle moral of *The Ancient Mariner*, which comes at the end of that far flight of the imagination like the settling of a bird into the nest, has its near counterpart in the close of *Peter Bell*."—Walter Raleigh: *Wordsworth*, p. 77.

Curiously enough, even Mr. Fausset regrets the "explicit moral".

³John Livingston Lowes: *The Road to Xanadu*, p. 303.