

SYMBOLS IN *THE ANCIENT MARINER* 43

The almost magical manner in which the poet combines these opposing motives here and in the next stanza deserves especial attention. Dread appears in

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,

and hope in the reappearance of the familiar reassuring word *softly*:

Yet she sailed softly too.

Hope is augmented in the line:

Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—

But lingering dread lifts itself again in the melancholy reflection:

On me alone it blew.

The Mariner prays (for he has learned long since to pray)¹⁶ that his incredible homecoming may not be as the vision of a dream. "He beholdeth," says the gloss, "his native country." And he loves it as never before, not only for the welcoming that its familiar landmarks offer his heart, but also because the Moon still accompanies him, steeping in calm and silentness the bay, the rock, the kirk, the steady weatherecock. He had not heeded the white moonshine that glimmered through night and fog when he slew the Albatross; but now he knows the meaning of the Moon—the eternal Love of God—and he turns to the Hermit for confession and absolution. Confession made, he is duly shriven, but, says Coleridge in the gloss, with penetrating intention: "The penance of life falls on him. And ever and anon throughout his future life an agony constraineth him to travel from land to land. And to teach by his own example love and reverence to all things that God made and loveth."

Professor Lowes, in his fifteenth chapter, "Wefts and Spectres", several times appears to recognize that there is in the poem some such contrast as this paper has tried to indicate, but he pauses always on the threshold of allegorical intention

¹⁶Cf. lines 244-7, 288, 469, 605-617.