

SYMBOLS IN *THE ANCIENT MARINER* 39

As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she nears and nears!
Are those her sails that glance in the Sun,
Like restless gossameres?

Are those her ribs through which the Sun
Did peer, as through a grate?
And is that Woman all her crew?
Is that a Death? and are there two?
Is Death that woman's mate?

Guilt and Fear have interposed themselves between God and the sinful Mariner and his mates, who find themselves now wholly in the power of Death and of Life-in-Death. The crew become the prey of Death,¹⁵ while the Mariner falls to the lot of Life-in-Death. She whistles thrice, and at that sinister signal the sense of the Divine presence is wholly lost:

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark;
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre-bark.

One after one, under "the star-dogged Moon" (distorted symbol, for the moment, of an alienated Love), the sailors perish, and the Mariner is abandoned to the horror of utter separation from his Creator. By his own act he has become a castaway. No saint takes pity on his soul in agony. Like Claudius and Macbeth, he seeks to pray and fails to pray. Divorced altogether from hope or help, for seven days and seven nights he

¹⁵Professor Lane Cooper, in his trenchant paper, *Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Mr. Lowes* (P. M. L. A., Vol. XLIII, No. 2), offers this objection: "For agreeing after the fact that it was good to slay the bird, they suffer excruciating tortures, and die in misery. Is their credulous mistake an adequate tragic *hamartia*? Dream or no dream, the situation is revolting." Perhaps Professor Cooper has not sufficiently considered (1) that the Mariner's punishment is much more severe than that suffered by his comrades; (2) that the allegory requires his isolation; (3) that Wordsworth (whose 'Aristotelian' criticism of the poem Professor Cooper approves and who suggested, as the same paper notes, "the reanimation of the dead bodies by souls, presumably angelic") must himself have approved, at least tacitly, the plan Coleridge follows. As Fausset remarks, in controverting Wordsworth's well-known strictures, the poem has "its own higher logic".