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DAMIAN WALFORD DAVIES

Diagnosing “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”: Shipwreck, Historicism, Traumatology

FORGING A NEW HISTORICISM AVANT LA LETTRE IN *THE ROAD TO XANADU* (1927), John Livingston Lowes claimed that in his voracious consumption of voyage narratives prior to writing “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” Coleridge read “with an eye which habitually pierced to the secret spring of poetry beneath the crust of fact.”¹ Recognizing the poem as “a supreme crystallisation of the spirit of maritime expansion,”² New Historicism has subsequently embraced the task of excavating the poem with an eye that pierces to the secret layers of “fact” beneath the crust of “poetry.” History’s quarried particulars, identified since the early 1960s, have ranged from (premonitions of) a slaver,³ “colonial expansion,” “European racial guilt,” the killing of a slave, and “abolition propaganda”⁴ to the pathogenesis and “material conditions” of yellow fever,⁵ the terror of impressment,⁶ “tremors of political faith,” “political complicity,”⁷ misplaced jacobinism, national political guilt,⁸ and the psychodrama of

1. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930 [1927]), 36–37.

2. J. R. Ebbatson, “Coleridge’s Mariner and the Rights of Man,” *SiR* 11, no. 3 (1972): 175.

3. See Malcolm Ware, “Coleridge’s ‘Spectre-Bark’: A Slave Ship?” *Philological Quarterly* 40 (1961): 589–93; William Empson, “*The Ancient Mariner*,” *Critical Quarterly* 6 (1964): 298–319; William Empson, “‘The Ancient Mariner’: An Answer to Warren,” *The Kenyon Review* 15 (1993): 155–77; and William Empson and David Pirie, eds., *Coleridge’s Verse: A Selection* (London: Faber, 1972), 28–30.

4. See Ebbatson, “Coleridge’s Mariner,” 182, 198.

5. Debbie Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 49.

6. See Ve-Yin Tee, *Coleridge, Revision and Romanticism: After the Revolution, 1793–1818* (London: Continuum, 2009), 58.

7. Patrick J. Keane, *Coleridge’s Submerged Politics: The Ancient Mariner and Robinson Crusoe* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 250, 268, 270, 271.

8. Peter Kitson, “Coleridge, The French Revolution and ‘The Ancient Mariner’: Collective Guilt and Individual Salvation,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 19 (1989): 197–207.

SiR, 55 (Winter 2016)

Coleridge's own neuroses ("a projection, albeit an exaggerated one, of intellectual and emotional tendencies in himself").⁹ Each has been tailored with varying degrees of persuasiveness to the layered contours of "The Ancient Mariner." In all of this, the ostensible—and not easily exorcisable—master-narrative of unthinking transgression, horrific castigation, compound penance, and compulsive restitution has retained its power both to accommodate and to contest historicist readings. Carl Thompson has emphasized that "The Ancient Mariner" is crucially "indebted" to what he terms the "scripts" of contemporary shipwreck narratives and the literature of "maritime misadventure."¹⁰ In this essay, I offer a new interdisciplinary reading of "The Ancient Mariner" that identifies the traumatic subjectivity of the Mariner-as-shipwreck-survivor as the very condition of the poem's narration. Further, I credit Coleridge with a remarkably prescient dramatization—an empathetic inhabitation—of a condition of trauma codified only in the late twentieth century: post-traumatic stress disorder.

1. Diagnostic Uncertainty

As the core event to be excavated in "The Ancient Mariner," *naufnage* (literally, the breaking of a ship) and its traumatic aftermath clearly represent a different order of "fact" from those already listed above. However, some of the critical methods I deploy will be recognizable to those familiar with materialist excavations of Romantic texts. At the outset, it is worth profiling the acute hermeneutic challenge posed by the poem. Interpretation is taxed by the poem's "sheer excess"¹¹ and "omnisignificance";¹² its multiple vocalities that collapse "borders of speech"; its relativization of centers of authority; and its knowing interpellation of the reader by means of seductive totalizing schemas that elicit what J. R. Ebbatson has described as "Pavlovian" critical responses.¹³ As Raimonda Modiano has shown, some of the most robust historicist readings fail to extricate themselves from the alluring, essentialist interpretative frames the poem promotes, just as the Mariner himself can be seen to order his nightmare experience

9. Carl Thompson, *The Suffering Traveller and the Romantic Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 105.

10. Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 62, 100.

11. Paul H. Fry, "A Critical History of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,'" in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism), ed. Paul H. Fry (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's, 1999), 84. For clarity, this volume will hereafter be cited as Fry, *TRAM*.

12. David Perkins, "'The Ancient Mariner' and Its Interpreters: Some Versions of 'Coleridge,'" *Modern Language Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (September 1996): 447.

13. See Susan Eilenberg, "Voice and Ventriloquy in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,'" in Fry, *TRAM*, 282–313 and Ebbatson, "Coleridge's Mariner," 172.

within orthodox paradigms that guarantee the social acceptability of his story—indeed, its very communicability.¹⁴ Critical readings have wrestled with the apparent “emptiness” of the poem’s historical referentiality (a vacuum that actively invites us to supply our own excess of historical data), its construction of an “undomestic atopia, a site both maddeningly blank and refractive of the fragments of mythology once attached to its textual representations,”¹⁵ and the arbitrariness and irrationality that characterize the poem’s cosmos.¹⁶ Further teasing aporiae (for which my own reading will have to account) include the repudiation of “rationalist cartography” and the seemingly programmatic elision of what David Simpson has called the “*work* of running a ship.”¹⁷

Historicist reactions against the sacramental reading influentially enshrined in 1946 by Robert Penn Warren (who schematized Coleridge’s “symbolist Christian hermeneutics”¹⁸) have taken multiple forms. In its most energizing (and tendentious) deconstructionist configurations, New Historicism has elatedly inhabited the “artfully assembled”¹⁹ historical *negatio* of “The Ancient Mariner” to construct an underlying historical “alterity” that has often rendered the received poem uncannily counterfeit and spectral. The creative resourcefulness of such encounters should not be underestimated; as well as leading historicist criticism into cul-de-sacs, the historical “emptiness” of the “The Ancient Mariner,” noted above, has also delivered the reader-critic into a condition of radical co- and re-authorship. And so the result has hardly been victory to historicist/psychoanalytical archaeology but rather (to deploy the psychopathological discourse I will pursue in this essay) diagnostic uncertainty and the need to acknowledge the *syndromic* condition (the *corpus* of symptoms and signs) with which “The Ancient Mariner” can be said to “present.”

In a brief, seemingly off-the-cuff (and too little-noticed) intervention as far back as 1949, Lionel Stevenson suggested that the Mariner is the casualty of the “perversity of storms and calms” on a ship cast “hopelessly off its

14. See Modiano, “Sameness of Difference? Historicist Readings of ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’” in Fry, *TRAM*, 187–215, and the same author’s “Words and ‘Languageless’ Meanings: Limits of Expression in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (March 1977): 43, 46, 49.

15. Siobhan Carroll, *An Empire of Air and Water: Uncolonizable Space in the British Imagination, 1750–1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 38.

16. See Edward E. Bostetter, “The Nightmare World of ‘The Ancient Mariner,’” *SiR* 1, no. 4 (Summer 1962): 351–98.

17. Simpson, “How Marxism Reads ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’” in Fry, *TRAM*, 155–56.

18. See Modiano, “Sameness of Difference?” 189.

19. See Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth’s Great Period Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 8–9.

course,” and that “the increase in ‘allegory’ in the latter part of the poem . . . is concurrent with the increasing delirium of the victim.”²⁰ For Stevenson, the poem is a dramatic monologue whose “distorted symbolism” betokens the “psychopathology” of the sole survivor of maritime mishap. Later twentieth-century and recent criticism has responded to the poem’s discourse of “disordered consciousness”²¹ (“swound,” “trance”) by employing such terms as “trauma,” “traumatic guilt,” “neurosis,” “delirium,” “repetition compulsion,” “monomania,” “dementia” and “schizophrenic” to get a purchase on the contours of that “distorted symbolism.”²² However, it has not taken up the challenge of Stevenson’s psychopathological reading. Drawing attention to the ways in which “The Ancient Mariner” articulates an interest in the discrepancy between core event and textual retelling, between “experience” and “discourse,” Modiano reminds us of Coleridge’s own plan to compose “a poem on delirium . . . connected with the imagery of high latitudes” (the Arctic, as opposed to the mariner’s southern site of terror, the *terra incognita australis*). Here, Modiano reaches—as I also propose to—for what she calls “the experience the Mariner is likely to have undergone,” his unspoken “private history.” Yet the “devastating experience” that Modiano sees as being compromised by the social moment of retelling (the Wedding Guest-as-auditor compelling the teller to modify his “sensory” language with rationalizing, “conceptual” discourse) remains vaguely apprehended as an “unorthodox” experience, an “untranslatable” episode.²³

Further, naufrage has regularly been invoked in critical discourse on “The Ancient Mariner” without being explicitly confronted as the poem’s

20. See Stevenson, “‘The Ancient Mariner’ as a Dramatic Monologue,” *The Personalist* 30 (1949): 34–44.

21. John Beer, *Coleridge’s Poetic Intelligence* (London, Macmillan, 1977), 153.

22. See Simpson, “How Marxism Reads ‘The Rime,’” 158, 161, 187; Ebbatson, “Coleridge’s Mariner,” 181; Anne Williams, “An I for an Eye: ‘Spectral Persecution’ in ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’” in Fry, *TRAM*, 255; Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 104; Modiano, “Words and ‘Languageless’ Meanings,” 46; Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 287; Daniel P. Watkins, “History as Demon in Coleridge’s ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,’” *Papers on Language & Literature* 24, no. 1 (Winter, 1988): 30; and David S. Miall, “Guilt and Death: The Predicament of The Ancient Mariner,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 24, no. 4 (Autumn 1984): 638. See also, more generally, Thomas Pfau’s discussion of trauma as a “mood” of British and German Romanticism between 1800 and 1815 in *Romantic Moods: Paranoia, Trauma, and Melancholy, 1789–1840* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), 191–306. As early as 1834, John Wilson referred to the Mariner’s world of “madness” in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, while in 1849 Aubrey de Vere gestured at future psychoanalytical readings when he referred to the poem as “the subjective Odyssey of a psychological age”; see Woodring, “The Mariner’s Return,” *SiR* 11, no. 4 (Fall 1972): 370.

23. Modiano, “Words and ‘Languageless’ Meanings,” 40–61.

core event. Stevenson's mariner has experienced "the physical and mental tortures of thirst, exposure, and delirium"; Carl Woodring's figure is similarly a misadventurer, "the only survivor from a crew who were the first ever to burst into a perilous, estranging element."²⁴ Richard Haven remarks that, of contemporary reviews of *Lyrical Ballads*, "only the *Naval Chronicle* was undisturbed by the seeming irrationality of the poem," but the possible reasons for this are not plumbed.²⁵ Moreover, historicist readings are curiously in thrall to the operations of the symbolic, and historicist demystifications have not always gone hand-in-hand with a commitment to a materialism that makes a virtue of literalism to get at what Coleridge was later to call "the *Text* of the actual experience."²⁶ Though valorizing a thorough historicization of "The Ancient Mariner," Patrick Keane cites the "surface" narrative at the end of the poem—"The Mariner's ship . . . is eventually overwhelmed and destroyed"—only to discover the "meaning" of the episode on the other side of a symbolic equation: "The historical reference may be the Revolution itself, or Coleridge's own radical 'bark,' this time lost in the whelming tide."²⁷ "There is no shipwreck as such in *The Ancient Mariner*," writes Carl Thompson, reminding us at the same time that "wrecks figure prominently in two of the poem's most important sources" and that the poem's "images of hunger and thirst" clearly "reprise scenes and situations that are staple elements in almost all variants of 'shipwreck' narrative."²⁸

The historicist-traumatological reading I offer locates a material traumatic event "outside the range of usual human experience"²⁹ (a "stressor," in technical parlance)—naufage—as the defining experience rehearsed by the Mariner. Developing a model of what I will call "traumatic reading" through Coleridgean layers of telling, my speculative excavation of the "submerged" condition of "The Ancient Mariner" is pitched towards a clinical diagnosis of its central figure (a diagnosis that also partly relates to Coleridge himself). Reading the poem as *a disturbed survivor's account of*

24. Stevenson, "The Ancient Mariner' as Dramatic Monologue," 41; Woodring, "Mariner's Return," 375.

25. Haven, "The Ancient Mariner in the Nineteenth Century," *SiR* 11, no. 4 (Fall 1972): 365.

26. Quoted in Modiano, "Words and 'Languageless' Meanings," 42.

27. Keane, *Coleridge's Submerged Politics*, 269. Critical displacement, transference and parapraxis often seem to characterize encounters with "The Ancient Mariner": Keane goes on to state that the historicist thesis of his book on *Robinson Crusoe* and "The Ancient Mariner" may amount to "genuine discovery" or, conversely, "critical shipwreck."

28. Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 62.

29. See Brenda Parry-Jones and William Ll. Parry-Jones, "Post-Traumatic Stress-Disorder: Supportive Evidence from an Eighteenth-century Natural Disaster," *Psychological Medicine* 241 (February 1994): 22.

shipwreck and its terrible aftermath, overlaid by a pathology of the gothic and by the psychosis of the supernatural, I draw on the insights of psycho-traumatology and trauma studies with the aim of both rationalizing and estranging the poem. Negotiating the poem's timeframes and multiple textual incarnations, I explore the viability of reading "The Ancient Mariner" as a document of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the context of the period's shipwreck narratives. It is important to state clearly that I interpret the poem as a conscious exercise in depicting traumatized subjectivity. I regard the poem's resistance to totalizing readings partly as a function of the forms taken by the subject's trauma-induced psychosis and, as I shall explain with reference to the work of Dominic LaCapra, as a mode of Coleridgean empathy. In section 5 below, I extend the methods of deconstructionist historicism into formal "creative-critical" territory in an act of salvage that seeks to fill out the traumatic *negatio* of Coleridge's poem.

Taking "The Ancient Mariner" as a case study in historical experiences of trauma, I am also seeking to intervene in a lively debate in the history of psychology as to whether trauma is a "culturally and linguistically constructed" condition whose "symptomatic evidence" originated only when "the language to name the phenomenon was created."³⁰ I concur with those commentators who contend that the experience of trauma *predates* the nineteenth-century study of traumatic memory and the late-twentieth-century codification of PTSD. "Melancholy," "mania," "nostalgia" and "hysteria" were all available to Coleridge as terms describing *some* of the symptoms associated with the syndrome we now know as PTSD. I seek to show that an investigation that admits the evidence of a Romantic literary text (and thus the possibility of an imaginative, empathetic representation of traumatized subjectivity) reveals diagnostic precursors that give the disorder a (literary) "history" before its naming as "shell shock," "combat neurosis," "exhausted heart" and PTSD. At the same time, given the ways in which "The Ancient Mariner" knowingly plays with disjunctions of language and historical perspective—part of the "disalignments" and "breaches" that Josiah Blackmore sees as characteristic of shipwreck narra-

30. Donna Trembinski, "Comparing Premodern Melancholy/Mania and Modern Trauma: An Argument in Favor of Historical Experiences of Trauma," *History of Psychology* 14, no. 1 (2011): 84, 81. I am grateful to Linda Reesman for this reference. See also Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810–1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9–10; Parry-Jones and Parry-Jones, "Post-Traumatic Stress-Disorder, 15–37; Shoshana Ringel, "Overview" in *Trauma: Contemporary Directions in Theory, Practice, and Research*, eds. Ringel and Jerrold R. Brandell (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2012), 1–12; and Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Scribner, 1994).

tives generally³¹—the lingering charge of anachronism is profoundly to be relished (indeed, *embraced* as a valuable heuristic). Crucial, of course, is the need to remain self-aware as to the critical perils of this endeavor in the context of a plurally mediated poem that plays with culturally demarcated knowledge, layered timescales and multiple speakers and auditors, and which was revised over more than thirty years.

2. Hybrid Ontologies

There are many ways in which a poet can "writ[e] a ship to pieces," in Blackmore's phrase.³² My approach involves recovering from a paradigmatically elusive poem a traumatic discourse of naufrage and an aetiology of the Mariner's condition *qua* mariner. It also entails inflecting the critical orthodoxy that declares, in McGann's words, that "the materials dealt with by the 'Rime' are not—indeed, never were—mere 'secular' or 'natural' facts; they are pre-designed and preinterpreted phenomena."³³ In the note attached to the (revised) poem in the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth famously complained that the "Old Navigator" (the later Coleridge's fond name for his protagonist)³⁴ had no "distinct character" as regards "his profession of Mariner."³⁵ Perry defends Coleridge thus: "it is hard to see how passing remarks about knots or trade winds would have improved the poem, and anyway the point is precisely that the Mariner is regarding his experience not as an episode in his nautical career but as the turning point of his spiritual life."³⁶ One can agree with both statements, but it is precisely the material conditions of the Mariner's "nautical career" that claim attention here. It is of profound interest that in later life Coleridge said he had been told "by Longmans that the greater part of the *Lyrical Ballads* had been sold to seafaring men, who having heard of the Ancient Mariner, concluded that it was a naval song-book, or, at all events, that it had some relation to nautical matters."³⁷ The remark offers a purchase on the embeddedness of the poem within manifold contemporary discourses of the marine. Thus, I ask in what relation "The Ancient Mariner" might stand, not

31. Josiah Blackmore, *Manifest Perdition: Shipwreck Narrative and the Disruption of Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 59.

32. Blackmore, *Manifest Perdition*, 59.

33. Jerome J. McGann, "The Meaning of 'The Ancient Mariner,'" *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 58.

34. *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 2.

35. See *Lyrical Ballads 1798 and 1800*, eds. Michael Gamer and Dahlia Porter (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2008), 289.

36. Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, 286.

37. *Table Talk*, ed. Carl Woodring, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1990), 2:375.

only to contemporary narratives of shipwreck and imaginative responses to sea catastrophe, but also to other types of marine literature that occupied a significant place in the market, such as sea manuals and marine dictionaries—texts through which Coleridge would have cultivated a familiarity with a vessel's vulnerable materiality.

Contemporary “readings” of the poem by Hazlitt and Lamb interestingly offer prompts for the kind of materialist excavation on which my historicist-psychiatric interpretation is based. As is well known, the poem was begun as a magazine ballad in November 1797 during a walking tour west from Alfoxden on the Great Track over the Quantocks to West Quantoxhead and (probably) to the Bell Inn at Watchet with its “decaying harbour.”³⁸ At Broomstreet Farm, looking down on the Bristol Channel, Hazlitt pointed out to Coleridge during a later walk the “bare masts of a vessel on the very edge of the horizon and within the red-orbed disk of the setting sun, like his own spectre-ship in the *Ancient Mariner*.”³⁹ It is an act of touristic historicization that renders Coleridge's (not-yet-published) supernatural poem *kitsch*. The same materialization of the poem is the aim of Charles Lamb's mischievous historicist challenge to the sensibilities of the young De Quincey, who had called on Lamb only to talk about Coleridge:

Oh, I'll instance you . . . Pray, what do you say to this—

“The many men so beautiful,
And they all dead did lie?”

So beautiful indeed! Beautiful! Just think of such a gang of Wapping vagabonds, all covered with pitch, and chewing tobacco . . .⁴⁰

Lamb and Hazlitt—and as I hope to demonstrate, Coleridge's poem itself—display a desire to hold on to the very thing for which Coleridge took Wordsworth to task in his 1798 conversations with Hazlitt—“a something corporeal, a *matter-of-fact-ness*, a clinging to the palpable.”⁴¹

At the same time, Lamb could lament the fact that Coleridge tacked on to the poem in the 1800 *Lyrical Ballads* the subtitle “A poet's Reverie”—“as bad,” complained Lamb, “as Bottom the Weaver's declaration that he is

38. Tim Mayberry, *Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1992), 111.

39. Hazlitt, “My First Acquaintance with Poets,” in *The Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. Duncan Wu, 9 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), 9:106.

40. Thomas De Quincey, “Recollections of Charles Lamb [I],” in *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, ed. Grevel Lindop et al., 21 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2000–2003), 10:240.

41. Hazlitt, “My First Acquaintance,” 104.

not a Lion but only the scenical representation of a Lion."⁴² His point is that the subtitle subverts the "credit" of the tale's supernatural cosmos, undermining the spell that Coleridge would later name "the willing suspension of disbelief." Similar perceived disjunctions of frame bothered early and late Victorian critics. In the year of Coleridge's death, Henry Nelson Coleridge considered an "error" "the miraculous destruction of the vessel in the presence of the pilot and the hermit" at the close of the poem,

in respect of its bringing the purely preternatural into too close contact with the actual framework of the poem . . . There should have been no other witnesses of the truth of any part of the tale, but the "Ancient Mariner" himself.⁴³

"Mistake" is the word chosen by William Watson in 1893 to describe what he saw as the dissonant irruption of a world of "prodigies," properly the preserve of the main body of the poem, into the "province of the natural and regular" in the bay and harbour at the poem's close. "[O]ur feeling," he argued, "is somewhat akin to that of the Ancient Mariner himself, whose prayer is that he may either 'be awake' or 'sleep always.'"⁴⁴ Such dissatisfaction with the poem's hybrid ontologies (repeated in Pirie's view that the 1817 gloss "perverts" the core 1798 tale by functioning as a reactionary instrument of *Verfremdungseffekt*) gestures at the interpretative cruxes that critics were later to identify as part of the poem's very fabric.⁴⁵ I interpret the dissonances identified by critics from Lamb and Hazlitt onwards as pathological disturbances, markers of the poem's engulfed narrative of material naufrage.

On 16 September 1798, sailing "on a brisk south-westerly" on a Yarmouth packet bound for Germany, "the author of the *Ancient Mariner* found himself for the first time in open seas."⁴⁶ He was to repeat the experience on his 1804 journey to Malta. The streaming furrows and "hiccupping jerks" of the Mediterranean-bound *Speedwell* (fascinatingly, also the name of George Shelvocke's privateer—later wrecked—on which the albatross was shot in *A Voyage Round the World*) afforded him the opportunity to store up revisions for the poem deriving from experiential maritime

42. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marris, Jr., 3 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975–78), 1:266.

43. Alun R. Jones and William Tydeman, eds., *The Ancient Mariner and Other Poems: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 83–84.

44. Jones and Tydeman, *A Casebook*, 112.

45. Pirie and Empson, *Coleridge's Verse*, 214–15. See also McGann, "The Meaning of 'The Ancient Mariner,'" 40.

46. Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 204.

knowledge.⁴⁷ It was a journey on which he became acutely aware of a painful reading of “The Ancient Mariner” as “personal allegory”—a reading that his increasingly distressful experiences between 1798 and 1804 had made available.⁴⁸ Coleridge recognized the ways in which the poem had been signalling to him, hailing him proleptically, a (near-)dramatic monologue-turned-lyric cry.⁴⁹ This 1804 encounter with a poem now defamiliarized and rendered uncanny played a role, I suggest, in the decision taken in 1815–16 to layer the poem with a paratext that dramatizes the poem’s reception by an Early Modern glossist whom the discovered text interpellates in ways that further compound the poem’s indeterminacies.

“The Ancient Mariner” of 1798 was, however, the poem of a landlubber. And yet Coleridge had always been both troubled and fascinated by death-by-water and sea catastrophe. It is rarely recalled that as a boy he had come close to drowning in the Otter when he rolled down the riverbank in his sleep near Cadhay Bridge one October night following an argument with his brother Francis (Frank).⁵⁰ The experience had chronic physical—and, I suggest, lasting psychological—effects; as Richard Holmes has emphasized, it was to remain a nodal experience that Coleridge was to explore in multiple forms throughout his life.⁵¹ Frank was also an element in a further distressing event in which death, the figures of mariner and father, and Coleridge’s riverine near-escape became psychically entwined. It was on the very night that Coleridge’s father returned, cheery, from Plymouth, having deposited Frank as midshipman in the care of Admiral Graves of Cadhay, that he died.⁵² Testing water, crime, guilt, and deliverance-into-reading are the elements of the cognitive bundle associated with a later experience during Coleridge’s time at Christ’s Hospital (where William Wales, Captain Cook’s navigator, taught him mathematics). Having absent-mindedly collided with a passer-by on a London street, Coleridge was accused of picking pockets when in fact his arms were extended in a reverie in which he imagined himself to be Leander swimming the Hellespont. He walked away from the encounter with a subscription to a lending library in King Street—a gift from his erstwhile accuser, who

47. See Alethea Hayter, *A Voyage in Vain: Coleridge's Journey to Malta in 1804* (London: Robin Clark, 1993 [1973]).

48. See George Whalley, “The Mariner and the Albatross,” in Jones and Tydeman, *A Casebook*, 170, 177, 180n. (This is an inflected version of an essay that Whalley initially published in 1947.) See also Hayter, *A Voyage in Vain*, 41–42.

49. See Paul Magnuson, *Coleridge and Wordsworth: A Lyrical Dialogue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 80.

50. Mayberry, *Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country*, 13.

51. See Holmes, *Early Visions*, 17–18.

52. See Mayberry, *Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country*, 13, 14.

was impressed by the intensity of the boy's imaginative life.⁵³ One of his earliest surviving poems, "Dura Navis," written as an exercise at Christ's Hospital, imagines various sea-catastrophes—naufrage, a naval battle, and cannibalism—with ghoulish schoolboy relish.⁵⁴ Further, dangerous pilotage and navigation formed one of the metaphorical lenses through which Coleridge read the course of the French Revolution in the mid-1790s, particularly the careers of Robespierre and Pitt.⁵⁵ As we shall see, Coleridge was profoundly attuned to the "distinct subgenre" and "bookseller's staple" of contemporary shipwreck narratives ("factual" and more imaginatively mediated) through which Romantic-period readers absorbed the experience of "the hapless voyager," "profoundly marked, transformed even, by a terrifying ordeal at sea."⁵⁶ I suggest that when the adult Coleridge, saturated in the genre of naufrage, came to write wreck, he was not only living himself imaginatively and empathetically into another's trauma, but also negotiating an early, personal traumatic complex in which potentially killing water, guilt, family loss, and writing itself are intimately connected.

3. "The Ancient Mariner" and its Co-Texts: The Genetics of Naufrage

Symptomatically, "Dura Navis" was to be restaged at the very moment Coleridge was preparing to become a family man. I suggest that the September 1795 composition, "Lines written at Shurton Bars," represents a crucial pre and cotext for "The Ancient Mariner." With Sara Fricker as addressee, Coleridge contrasts the gentle influence of his wife-to-be with his own previous gloomy—indeed, macabre—imaginative predispositions. In stanzas labelled "a sea-piece" by John Aikin,⁵⁷ the poem floats a number of images that were to be given complex texture in "The Ancient Mariner":

Dark reddening from the channelled Isle
 (Where stands one solitary pile
 Unslated by the blast)
 The watchfire, like a sullen star
 Twinkles to many a dozing tar
 Rude cradled on the mast.

Even there—beneath that light-house tower—
 In the tumultuous evil hour

53. See Holmes, *Early Visions*, 27–28.

54. S. T. Coleridge, *The Complete Poems*, ed. William Keach (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997), 4–5. Hereafter, *CP*.

55. See *Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion*, eds. Lewis Patton and Peter Mann (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), 33, 74.

56. Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 61, 64, 60.

57. *Monthly Review* 20 (June 1796): 197.

Ere Peace with Sara came,
 Time was, I should have thought it sweet
 To count the echoings of my feet,
 And watch the storm-vexed flame.

And there in black soul-jaundiced fit
 A sad gloom-pampered Man to sit
 And listen to the roar;
 When mountain surges bellowing deep
 With an uncouth monster leap
 Plunged foaming on the shore.

Then by the lightning's blaze to mark
 Some toiling tempest-shattered bark;
 Her vain distress-guns hear;
 And when a second sheet of light
 Flashed o'er the blackness of the night—
 To see no vessel there!

(*CP*, 90, lines 37–60)

In this epistle-cum-ode, which marks a transition from Coleridge's early effusion-lyrics towards the dialogic mode of the conversation poems⁵⁸—naufage is staged as theatrical spectacle and aural event for a pathological watcher. I read the poem as dramatizing more than Coleridge's "gloomy desire for stimulation from violent flashes," in John Beer's formulation.⁵⁹ Naufrage needs a spectator, and there is here a fantasy of wreck, a craving for outrageous stimulation from the pageantry of sea accident.⁶⁰ The unholy trade with which the speaker flirts in "Lines written at Shurton Bars" is, I suggest, that of the *wrecker* who derives benefit from sea distress. In the Gutch Memorandum Book, Coleridge noted in 1796: "Mem—To remember to examine into the Laws upon Wrecks as at present existing."⁶¹ The memo was part of a compulsion to explore what might be "salvaged," creatively and psychically, from the Romantic period's complex investment in sea calamity in the very act of writing it.

58. See Mayberry, *Coleridge and Wordsworth in the West Country*, 54.

59. Beer, *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence*, 162.

60. The fantasy is repeated as a parable of retribution in Coleridge's Aesopian, One Life fable, "The Raven" (published in the *Morning Post* in March 1798). Here, the "bulging" of a ship (Coleridge uses the technical term: to "bulge" or "bilge" is to be smashed open at the hull) is the consequence of the felling of a tree (the source of the ship's wood) that is home to raven chicks.

61. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, eds. Kathleen Coburn, Merton Christensen and Anthony John Harding, 5 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957–2002), 1 (Text): [no.] 166.

To apply Carl Thompson’s theorization of the governing paradigms of eighteenth-century shipwreck narratives to “The Ancient Mariner” is to recognize the credentials of Coleridge’s poem as a poem of naufrage. Thompson sees as characteristic of the genre “a multiplicity of different voices . . . brought together, sometimes coherently, sometimes less so”:

Reading a shipwreck narrative, one is often explicitly made aware that there exist alternative versions, and subtly different interpretations, of the events being described. Some accounts . . . also have a hybrid or patchwork aspect, as editors pirate material from earlier narratives, but then place around these extracts their own evaluations as to what happened, and why . . . shipwrecks gave rise to multiple narratives [that] can embrace quite different stylistic conventions and explicatory schema as they seek to make sense of these disasters. This welter of differing voices and accounts reflects the highly popular, and as it were unregulated, nature of this genre.⁶²

As Thompson notes, “The Ancient Mariner” inherits the hybridities of the wider genre. It was only in the first two decades of the nineteenth century that attempts were made, in the form of anthologies by Archibald Duncan, J. S. Clarke and J. G. Dalyell to “regulate” this fluid genre and form a “canon.”⁶³ The heteroglossia, piratical extraction, interleaving, and superimposed commentary that Thompson identifies, together with the slippages and indeterminacies that such a bricolage creates, are part of the cultural genetics of “The Ancient Mariner”—and of what one might call the “auto-pirating” that is its later gloss. Thompson emphasizes that a writer such as Maria Graham could be engaged by a publisher to “shape into a coherent narrative the various log books and journals deriving from a voyage”⁶⁴—the data or literary flotsam of naufrage collected and shaped as consumable artefact.

Drawing on the work of George Landow, who reads the cultural “iconology” of naufrage to distinguish a “typology” and “cultural code” of “shipwreck and imperilled mariners,”⁶⁵ Thompson categorizes the formulaic nature of contemporary shipwreck narrative in terms of a “disaster phase” followed by an “aftermath.” After the vessel is bilged,

it is not simply a physical structure that begins . . . to disintegrate. The social ties that bind the victims together as crews and as communities

62. Thompson, ed., *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2007), 13.

63. See Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 61–62.

64. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 27.

65. George Landow, *Images of Crisis: Literary Iconology, 1750 to the Present* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), 29, 37.

can also begin to unravel, and with them those internalised structures, the web of customary social norms and taboos, by which the victims maintain their self-control and their sense of identity.⁶⁶

Again, this speaks resonantly to “The Ancient Mariner,” which is profoundly concerned with the emergence of factionalism and the dissolution of chains of command and of communitarian and family ties. Shipwreck, Thompson argues, “constitutes . . . a violent irruption of formlessness into human existence” so that subsequent representations of naufrage are “at one level attempts to re-impose some degree of coherence and control” on an event whose significance exceeds the capacity to communicate (and recall) it.⁶⁷ Hence the prevalence in naufrage narratives of the “symbolic economy”⁶⁸ of “Providentialist” frames—evident also in the rubrics imposed on his experience by Coleridge’s Mariner. Thompson contends that the shipwreck genre constantly invokes what Landow calls “a hypothetical master narrative” against which “the actual events in any given wreck are constantly measured.”⁶⁹ Thus naufrage texts form a network of interrelated utterances, linked coordinates plotted in the context of a wider imaginative—and imperial maritime—cartography.

Thompson’s schema has the sublime terror of the disaster phase ceding, appallingly, to the “gothic horror”—the “revulsion and disgust”—of the “aftermath” phase, in which a grizzly interest in the response of the physical body to privation and trauma is displayed. This, in Blackmore’s formulation, is the moment when “the body under siege” takes center stage in all its vermin-ridden swollenness or emaciation.⁷⁰ Further, the unstable genre’s contested representations of the female *in extremis*—as both meekly trusting in the “beneficent purposes of Providence” and, in some of the more “low-brow sensationalizing accounts,” as “monstrous”—open a revealing porthole onto Coleridge’s demonic, leprosy-white female in the context of maritime disaster.

4. Crossing the Critical Bar

To salvage “The Ancient Mariner” as a shipwreck narrative, I propose to supply a heteroglossic, multi-perspective “account” of the core material events which I suggest are submerged under the Mariner’s traumatic overlay or psychosis. Such a summoning of “supplement,” such an appropri-

66. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 14.

67. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 14.

68. See Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 72, 79 and 104 (where the author addresses the psychically incarcerating providentialism of the Mariner’s Catholic guilt).

69. Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 66.

70. Blackmore, *Manifest Perdition*, 96. See also Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 18.

ation of the role of creative historicist "glossist," may appear a radical departure from received critical methods. I argue it is not: as already noted, the antecedents of my creative-critical intervention are the historicist-deconstructionist modalities of Romantic New Historicism that have set themselves the challenge of recovering the elided material that conditions a work's "manifest" content. What follows is critically, not ironically or parodically, offered. Further, by creatively appropriating details from the narratives of the wrecks of the *Grosvenor*, the *Antelope*, the *Juno* and the *Earl of Abergavenny*, all published between 1791 and 1805 (and by supplying what Warren Stevenson calls "the curious semantic gap in the Mariner's job description"),⁷¹ I hope to test the rhetorical and hermeneutic limits of this particular modality of historicist engagement.

In addition, interleaved into my narrative is material from the three substantive editions of the most famous eighteenth-century poetic dramatization of naufrage: William Falconer's *The Shipwreck* (published in 1762, revised 1764 and 1769, and issued with a gatefold "Elevation of a Merchant Ship," drawn by Falconer, and a Chart). The poem's linguistic and political agendas have only recently begun to receive the serious critical attention they deserve.⁷² This immensely popular "sea epic" or "nautical georgic" is throughout informed by Falconer's own career in the "merchant marine and naval service,"⁷³ his lexicographical work as author of *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine* (1769; "a standard work . . . until the end of the days of sail"),⁷⁴ and his experience of actual shipwreck as a seventeen-year-old second mate on Cape Colonna, Greece in 1749 (a disaster only he and two others survived). Described by the *Naval Chronicle* in 1799 as "our English Virgil,"⁷⁵ Falconer was to lose his life in the wreck of the *Aurora* in 1770, an experience for which his own poem had disturbingly provided the template. The parallel with the ways in which "The Ancient Mariner" "hailed" the later Coleridge is suggestive. Such was the celebrity of *The Shipwreck* (its illustrated eighth edition appeared in 1794 and in the same year it was included by Robert Anderson, together with a life, in *A Complete Edition of the Poets of Great Britain*),⁷⁶ that it is likely, as Lowes has suggested, Coleridge knew it before framing "The Ancient Mariner."⁷⁷ In 1814–15 Coleridge was to write "To a Lady, with Falconer's Shipwreck,"

71. Stevenson, "The Case of the Missing Captain: Power Politics in 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,'" *Wordsworth Circle* 26, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 13.

72. For a recent discussion, see Carroll, *Empire of Air and Water*, 84–92.

73. William R. Jones, *A Critical Edition of the Poetical Works of William Falconer* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003), 3, 76.

74. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, xiii.

75. *The Naval Chronicle* 1 (1799): 467.

76. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, 16, 20.

77. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, 51, 480.

which offers an elegy for Falconer that is *already implied* in the double wreck of “The Ancient Mariner.” (After Falconer’s own death by naufrage, *The Shipwreck* itself necessarily took on the uncanny ontological status of double shipwreck narrative.) *The Shipwreck* has autobiographical, Philhellenic, epic, romantic and socio-political ambitions; its purpose was also to deliver “instruction in good seamanship” and to offer, as J. S. Clarke noted in 1804, “an harmonious poetic assemblage of technical terms and maxims,” together with

the rudiments of Navigation: if not sufficient to form a complete Seaman, it may certainly be considered as the Grammar of his professional Science. I have heard many experienced officers declare, that the rules and maxims delivered in this Poem, for the conduct of a Ship in the most perilous emergency, form the best, indeed the only, opinions which a skilful Mariner should adopt.⁷⁸

William R. Jones calculates that “one tenth” of those who bought the poem were “seafaring purchasers”—the same proportion as for *Lyrical Ballads*.⁷⁹

The creative-critical cento I now offer takes full advantage of the interpretative latitude offered by the recursive “The Ancient Mariner.” I take the poem’s own scalar shifts and palimpsestic telling as a cue for the multiplicity of perspectives and frames marshalled. It will immediately be apparent how the narrative constitutes an interpretative mapping of “The Ancient Mariner,” while necessarily leaving uncharted, as all readings do, stretches of resistant water.

5. Wreck: A Creative-Critical Excursus

Call him Abel: the nineteen-year-old apprentice pilot-navigator on the square-rigged carrack, the *Salvator*. He had considered a career as a shore-based coasting or bar-pilot, but being both ambitious and talented, he had chosen the life of a navigator on ocean-going vessels. The voyage was one of exploration to the great southern land mass, and the crew departed in high spirits. *Thus the rich vessel moves in trim array; / Like some fair virgin on her bridal day.*⁸⁰ Three months into the journey, a major storm drove them southwards towards the pole into treacherous ice floes—a zone inhabited

78. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, 70, 74–75. For a study of the ways in which the novel and “sea adventure fiction” from the early eighteenth century drew on and transformed maritime “craft” (interpreted as a set of both “specific skills”—navigation, seamanship, etc.—and “demeanors”), see Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

79. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, 76.

80. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, 159 (1769, Canto 1:938–39).

only by wandering birds whose attachment to the ship preoccupied the superstitious crew and which the young navigator helped shoot for food. *Soon to the sport of death the crew repair, / Dart the long lance, or spread the baited snare.*⁸¹ The storm passed. Assisted for over a week by a brisk south wind, the *Salvator* entered the uncharted sea on the continent's western side.⁸²

*They had not been able to take an observation for some days,*⁸³ owing to dense cloud. The navigator had given his apprentice the task of helping to calculate their position from previous measurements. The youth had done this too quickly. There was an error in his part of the reckoning; the ship was closer to the shore than he had assumed. Expecting no obstacles, the mate standing the second night watch relaxed his vigilance. A westerly wind was rising; at two in the morning, the keel struck offshore rocks. Immediately, the Captain *ordered to wear ship. The helm was accordingly put hard a-weather, the mizzen-stay-sail hauled down, the fore-top-sail and jib loosed, and the after-yards squared; by which her head was nearly brought round.*⁸⁴ *They fix the bars, and heave the windlass round, / At every turn the clattering pawls resound.*⁸⁵ This was to no avail. *They cut away the mizen-mast, the main and fore-top masts, and lowered the fore and main yards, to ease her.*⁸⁶ In the rain-lashed dark, and in increasingly high seas, the wind now driving them away from land, the ship bilged. *The trembling hull confess'd th'enormous stroke; / The crashing boats th'impetuous pressure broke: / Companion, binnacle, in floating wreck, / With compasses and glasses strew'd the deck.*⁸⁷ Immediately, two of the boats were hoisted out, *nine inch hawsers* fastened to them, but they *veered away towards the stern of the ship*⁸⁸ before three of the ropes snapped. Abel, the master navigator and some of the officers, including the Captain, ascended on *the quarter-deck, that part being . . . best sheltered from the rain and sea by the quarter boards.* Captain Devis, who had previously been heard to exclaim "*O pilot! pilot! you have ruined me!*"⁸⁹ now endeavoured to revive the drooping spirits of his crew, by reminding them, that *shipwreck was a misfortune to which navigators were always liable.* He warned them against *disagreement among themselves*, but his discourse was undermined by the second mate, who cried that their situation *was rendered more difficult and distressing, by its happening in an unknown and unfrequented sea. As they were almost worn out by the excessive labour they*

81. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, 167 (1769, Canto 2:73–74).

82. Respected here is the fact that "The Ancient Mariner" is predicated on a post-Columbus, but pre-Magellan, voyage.

83. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 39.

84. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 39–40.

85. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, 148 (1764, Canto 1:648–49).

86. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 100.

87. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, 196 (1762, Canto 2:241–44).

88. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 41.

89. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 100, 153.

had undergone, two glasses of wine and some biscuits were given to every man aboard.⁹⁰ Two of the remaining boats were hoisted out; with great difficulty, three officers, with the Third Mate and two of the ship's boys, succeeded in lowering themselves down into one. The sea was *running mountains high*, and no sooner had one of the officers grabbed the oars than both pinnaces were lost to sight; now the *upper deck and upper parts of the hull were going to pieces, and the rigging that supported the masts, to which 72 unfortunate wretches clung, gave way.*⁹¹

When the storm abated, the *Salvator*, broken in two, was left *exposed to the scorching heat of a vertical sun*. The navigator instructed Abel to lie down in a blanket that had been previously dipped in the sea, the pores of the skin absorbing the water, and leaving the salt on the surface.⁹² The sun's languid fires, *half-lost in ambient haze, / Refract, thro' madid clouds, a crimson blaze; / Till deep immerg'd, the sick'ning orb descends.*⁹³ On the fourth day Abel had a most refreshing sleep, in which his mind dwelt on former scenes . . . and all those nearest to his heart. He dreamed he was lying in a raging fever, and that his sister arrived at his bedside, *dressed in lawn, and with a mitre like a bishop*, and that while she *continued praying, the fever went off, but whenever she ceased, it returned*. He thought she *administered the sacrament to him, and just as she was about to put the cup to his lips, he awoke.*⁹⁴

The next day *was very hot, and the sea smooth*. The Captain was raving. *In his phrenzy, he thought he saw a table covered with all sorts of choice meats, and wildly demanded why the crew did not give him of this, or that dish. In the evening there came on a squall, which . . . brought the most seasonable relief. The mariners had no means of catching it, but by spreading out their cloaths, most of which had been . . . drenched by the salt water. Another expedient the crew had frequent recourse to, finding it supplied their mouths with temporary moisture, was chewing any substance they could find, generally a bit of canvas, or even lead. One of the officers, whose body broke out in ulcers of a very disgusting appearance, died in the cat-harpings just under the mizen-top. His next neighbour tried to throw the body into the sea, but it had got . . . jammed in among the ropes . . . and it remained there a day or two longer, until the stench became intolerable. During the sixth day, two others died in the mizen, and two more in the fore-top—wretches with whom those on the shattered deck had for the past three days had no communication, since those aloft were no longer able to come down the rigging or speak loud enough to be heard.*⁹⁵

90. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 100.

91. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 123.

92. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 123.

93. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, 184 (1762, Canto 2:114–16).

94. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 124.

95. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 124–27.

Night of the fifth day came on, and the wind turned. The *sore-shatter'd*⁹⁶ *Salvator* began drifting at a steady pace before an easterly. Those clinging to life now believed they *would die of extreme cold*, but as the sun rose, it *diffused its influence throughout their whole frames as they exposed first one side, then the other, until their limbs became pliant. As the meridian heat approached, the scorching rays renewed their torments, and they wondered how they could have wished the rain to cease.*⁹⁷ Seeing the great distress of a young boy, Abel *crawled on all fours along the weather gun-wale and made him fast to the rail to prevent his being washed away. Whenever the boy was seized with a fit of retching, the apprentice navigator wiped away the foam from his lips: and if a shower came, he made him open his mouth to receive the drops, or gently squeezed them into it from a rag. In this affecting situation, both remained for a day and a night, till the boy expired.*⁹⁸ More than one fancied they saw one of the lost boats drawing close, *Wheeling in mazy tracks.*⁹⁹

It was on the sixth day the survivors, mouthing prayers for forgiveness, began the horrid work of severing dead flesh to ease their craving for food.

6. “The Ancient Mariner”: Salvaging Naufrage

With the above multi-vocal narrative in place, we are a step closer to a diagnosis. I now proceed to salvage the poem’s grammar of naufrage.

“There was a Ship”: in all versions of the poem, this is the Mariner’s gambit. It highlights the core physical object the narrative will soon insist on estranging. We attune ourselves at the poem’s opening to an unstable atmosphere of cheeriness, sea-peril and pathological fantasy. This is not a scene “marked by optimism and security”—as Daniel P. Watkins sees it—in any simple way.¹⁰⁰ The harbour bar (a sandbank) is “clear’d” (1798, line 25):¹⁰¹ a term implying the negotiation of a potentially hazardous barrier. Moreover, we have been enabled as readers to recognize in this opening a psychogeography of fear that attaches to the coordinates invoked by the Mariner: “Below the Kirk, below the Hill, / Below the Light-house top” (1798, 27–28). It is precisely below the lighthouse that the speaker of “Lines written at Shurton Bars” took up his macabre position as spectator of naufrage and would-be wrecker. There is a deathly circularity to the narrative in this regard: it is locked into a cycle not only of wreck but also of *wrecking*. As the ship drifts back across the harbour bar at the end of the

96. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, 211 (1769, Canto 2:668).

97. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 127.

98. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 128.

99. Jones, *Poetical Works of William Falconer*, 119 (1769, Canto 1:271).

100. Watkins, “History as Demon,” 29.

101. I quote “The Ancient Mariner” from the parallel 1798 and 1817 texts in Fry, *TRAM*, 26–75.

1798 telling, the Mariner sees dark red shadows “Like as of torches” congregating first before the prow and then before the mast: bodies with burning right arms. This is followed by the visions of the seraph men, signalling to shore. Though he does not mention wrecking, Watkins sees the signals of the angelic beings as false beacons, leading the pilot, the pilot’s boy and the hermit “towards their destruction.”¹⁰² I see this episode of the “Hands of Glory”¹⁰³ and the seraphic lights—in which the usual relation between bay and shore is disturbingly reversed—as bound up with a psychosis in which the trauma of wreck and wrecking is rehearsed in distressing forms.

The poem’s opening stanzas also serve to establish from the first a *bathymetric* discourse—a discourse of depths, of killing profundity (“drop,” “Below,” “Went down”)—on which the poem will henceforth dwell obsessively (“They dropp’d down one by one”; “This body dropt not down”; “sank / Like lead into the sea”; “nine fathom deep”; and finally and explicitly, “The Ship went down like lead” and “Like one that had been seven days drown’d” (1798, 221, 233, 292–93, 392, 596, 599). This vector counterbalances that axis in the poem—proper to the pilot-navigator I have posited—that reaches up to sun, moon, and stars (all navigational aids). Ann Williams’s Kristevan-Lacanian engagement with the poem identifies the “reorganization” of the Mariner’s world from Part 4 onwards along “a vertical plane”; “displacement,” she argues, “a metonymic primary process hitherto dominant, is replaced by the metaphoric function of condensation . . . Freudian depth psychology.”¹⁰⁴ I read the nightmare world of the Mariner as one of *actual* bathymetries that are then rehearsed psycho-traumatically.

There is a spatial rhetoric to the epitexts that Coleridge added for publication in 1817 that speaks of wreck. Alongside the body of the poem, the epigraph and marginal glosses conjure a corpus now fractured and split; each gloss relativizes the priority and authority of the poem’s “unit of form” (to invoke Blackmore’s phrase for a vessel riding the sea’s “formlessness”) and is the wreck of its integrity.¹⁰⁵ Accounting for the phrase “Broad as a weft” (1798, 83)—which Francis Wrangham in his review of the poem in 1798 found “nonsensical”¹⁰⁶—Lowe identifies “weft” (also “waft”) as “a ‘Sea-Word’ if ever there was one,” and cites Falconer’s *Universal Dictionary of the Marine* which defines it as “a signal displayed from the stern of a ship for some particular purpose . . . particularly . . . as a signal for a pilot to re-

102. Watkins, “History as Demon,” 29.

103. See Lowe, *The Road to Xanadu*, 555–58.

104. Williams, “An I for an Eye,” 251.

105. Blackmore, *Manifest Perdition*, 2. See also Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 14.

106. *British Critic* 14, no. 4 (October 1799): 365.

pair on board."¹⁰⁷ Lowes quotes a Navy Signal Book of 1650 that specifically instructs the weft to be displayed to indicate "a ship distressed and disabled by loss of masts . . . or . . . in danger of sinking or taking." Excised from the poem after 1798, the term occurs immediately after the Mariner's account of shooting the albatross but immediately before he logs the fact that a "good south wind still blew behind" (1798, 85). Thus there is no logical, linear "fit" between suggestions of imperilment and impending naufrage (which "weft" carries) on the one hand and explicit articulations of crisis on the other; rather, naufrage is recalled across the body of the narration, diffused as the submerged master-theme of the rehearsed experience.

The very first marginal gloss of 1817 flutters with punning sea-talk: "An ancient Mariner meeteth three gallants bidden to a wedding-feast." A "gallant" or "top-gallant" is a sail, "expanded," according to Falconer's *Universal Dictionary of the Marine*, "above the topsail-yard."¹⁰⁸ When in 1875 Swinburne said of "The Ancient Mariner" that "to some it may seem as though this great sea-piece might have had more in it of the air and savour of the sea,"¹⁰⁹ he was not in a position explicitly to articulate the ways in which the narrator and the so-called later glossist (understood to be culturally and chronologically removed from the scene of trauma) repress, through puns and displacement of linear narrative, a nautical discourse of sea-distress. The critical temptation is, of course, to comb the narrative for "submerged" nautical terms (and hence suppressed or transformed core "stressors"). Certainly, the obsessive focus in Parts 4 and 5 on the lying and rising of dead men and on their accusing eyes deserves attention in this regard: "And there the dead men lay"; "and the sea and the sky / Lay like a load on my weary eye, / And the dead were at my feet"; "But O! more horrible than that / Is the curse in a dead man's eye!"; "It had been strange, even in a dream, / To have seen those dead men rise" (1798, 245, 252–54, 261–62, 335–36). The entries under "DEAD" in Falconer's *Dictionary* reveal a striking diagnostic constellation:

DEAD-EYE . . . a sort of round, flattish, wooden block . . . It is usually encircled with the end of a rope . . . and pierced with three holes through the flat, in order to receive the rope called a *laniard* . . . one of the dead-eyes is fastened in the lower-end of each shroud . . .

. . .

107. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, 265; William Falconer, *An Universal Dictionary of the Marine: or, a copious explanation of the technical terms and phrases employed in the construction . . . of a ship* (London: T. Cadell, 1784 [1769]), n.p. (entry under "WAFT").

108. Falconer, *Universal Dictionary of the Marine*, n.p. (entry under "TOP-SAILS").

109. A. C. Swinburne, "Coleridge," in Jones and Tydeman, *A Casebook*, 88.

DEAD-LIGHTS, certain wooden ports which are made to fasten into the cabin-windows, to prevent the waves from gushing into a ship in a high sea.

. . .

DEAD-RECKONING . . . in navigation, the judgment or estimation which is made of the place where a ship is situated, without any observation of the heavenly bodies.

. . .

DEAD-RISING . . . those parts of a ship's floor, or bottom, throughout her whole length, where the floor-timber is terminated upon the lower futtock.¹¹⁰

Underlying the Mariner's psychotic, gothicized visions, I contend, is the *very matter* of a constantly imperilled ship. We know from Coleridge's Notebooks that on his 1804 voyage to Malta he greatly augmented what knowledge of nautical terms he already possessed.¹¹¹ The evidence cited above suggests that he may well have sought to layer into "The Ancient Mariner" marine discourse that had possibly been learned through "sailors' talk in the ancient port of Bristol," in Lowes' phrase.¹¹² If that is convincing, the archaic term used to describe the song of the "sky-lark" (the 1798 text has the older term "Lavrock" [348]) and that of other birds in Part 5—"jargonizing"—resonates knowingly with the more contemporary meaning that was available to Coleridge. Once again, puns—sites of trauma—are revealed as agents that at once submerge and salvage a narrative of naufrage in the poem.

Coleridge's description of the uncanny movement of the ship—now becalmed, now scudding, now driven by the wind, now by supernatural agency—and that of the vessel carrying "The Night-Mair LIFE-IN-DEATH" (1817, 193) and her "mate" (another nautical term) are further instances of the ways in which the poem is embedded in the circulating marine literature of the day:

Till noon we silently sail'd on
 Yet never a breeze did breathe:
 Slowly and smoothly went the ship
 Mov'd onward from beneath.

Under the keel nine fathom deep
 From the land of mist and snow

110. Falconer, *Universal Dictionary of the Marine*, n.p (entries for the terms cited).

111. See Hayter, *A Voyage in Vain*, 70, 134.

112. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*, 272.

The spirit slid: and it was He
 That made the Ship to go.
 The sails at noon left off their tune
 And the Ship stood still also.

The sun right up above the mast
 Had fix'd her to the ocean:
 But in a minute she 'gan stir,
 With a short uneasy motion—
 Backwards and forwards half her length
 With a short uneasy motion.

(1798, 388–403)

This reads like a nightmare (psychotic) distortion of the laws of hydrographic motion as described in Falconer's *Dictionary*:

When a ship changes her state of rest into that of motion . . . she acquires her motion very gradually, as a body which arrives not at a certain velocity till after an infinite repetition of the action of it's [*sic*] weight . . . the repetition of the degrees of force, which the action of the sails adds to the motion of the ship, is perpetually decreasing; whilst on the contrary the new degrees added to the effort of resistance on the bow are always augmenting . . . when the two powers become equal . . . the ship will then acquire no additional velocity, but continue to sail with a *constant uniform motion* . . . when she has attained [her greatest velocity], she will advance by her own intrinsic motion . . . She moves then by her own proper force . . .¹¹³

"[W]ith a constant uniform motion": Coleridge's "With a short uneasy motion" is its calculated opposite. Underlying the gothic supernaturalism in "The Ancient Mariner" is the articulation by the (double-) shipwreck victim Falconer of "the whole theory of working ships" in the standard marine handbook of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

7. Diagnosing "The Ancient Mariner": Text and Trauma

And so the submerged metanarrative towards which I have been building through Coleridgean layerings is as follows:

I posit a Mariner who has experienced as a young navigator the extreme horrors of shipwreck in uncharted waters, and who believes his own navigational error to be the cause of that wreck. His guilt emerges in the obsessive attention he pays to sun, moon, and stars throughout his tale—a psychopathological rehearsal of a duty not done. His fixation with the

¹¹³. Falconer, *Universal Dictionary of the Marine*, n.p. (entry under "SAILING"); my emphasis.

discourse of dropping and sinking (“but O! the silence sank, / Like music on my heart” [1798, 535–36]) is another marker of his psychosis. Splintered and dismembered, the ship becomes a floating platform on which the privations and tortures of naufrage are suffered by the human body. The bodily symptoms described in the poem are those of shipwreck victims, down to the Mariner’s description of the way his “body” (as opposed to his lips) “drinks” moisture (1798, 306), which recalls the 1798 narrative of the 1795 wreck of the *Juno*, in which the whole body “drinks in” moisture from a wet sheet, leaving the skin white with salt (compare “Her skin is as white as leprosy” [1798, 198]; and “The steersman’s face by his lamp gleamed white” [1817, 211]). The ribbed “naked Hulk” of the spectre-bark that “plung’d and tack’d and veer’d,” displaying an “upright keel” (1798, 201, 148, 162), suggests a shattered, drifting lifeboat in which victims were not dicing, but dying. Further, the “wicked whisper” that comes and makes the Mariner’s “heart as dry as dust” (1798, 248–49) returns us to the ghastly consequences of sea calamity imaginatively inhabited by the youthful Coleridge in “Dura Navis.” Occurring after the Mariner’s act of sucking his own blood, and after the image of Fear sipping the Mariner’s blood “as at a cup” in the 1817 text, this is the whispered suggestion of the horrific necessity of cannibalism. (“Fear” here is itself a linguistic cannibalization of the archaic term used in 1798 [180] to describe the skeleton on the spectre bark: “Pheere” [companion]). Looks of accusation from the once-companionable crew now become looks of suspicious fear. The Mariner survives; the crew do not. He does so, I contend, *by means of* their bodies, both skeletal and bloated. This compounds his guilt, and thus his trauma.

Then there is a rescue, and a carrying home. It is perfect protocol for a bar-pilot and his understudy to row out to a ship anchored offshore in order to navigate a vessel safely into harbour; however, the Mariner recalls that this occurred *after* they had “drifted o’er the harbour bar.” Thus in this traumatized telling—in which a second, swifter naufrage is compulsively imagined—the bar-pilot is deprived of his navigational function, as if that very role is now seen as compromised by the Mariner’s own professional navigational failure out on the ocean.

Pathological repetition characterizes the trauma with which the Mariner makes landfall; the present telling is only the latest in a long line of what Cathy Caruth terms unwanted “insistent reenactments of the past.”¹¹⁴ Viewed in this frame, the Mariner’s narrative points to post-traumatic stress disorder, a disorder (or rather *syndrome*) officially codified only in 1980 in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* of the Ameri-

114. Cathy Caruth, ed., *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 151.

can Psychiatric Association. The term is applied (not unproblematically) to a psychopathological condition occasioned by "a psychologically traumatic event" that can be "both human and natural" (criteria set A).¹¹⁵ "Characteristic symptoms" include "re-experiencing" that harrowing life event.¹¹⁶ This can be in the form of "recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive memories"; "traumatic nightmares"; the sudden sense that the event is recurring (with associated psychotic responses such as hallucinations and flashbacks); and "intense or prolonged distress after exposure to traumatic reminders" (criteria set B).¹¹⁷ PTSD is also characterized by an "inability to recall key features of the traumatic event (usually dissociative amnesia)"; "feeling alienated from others (e.g., detachment or estrangement)"; "constricted affect"; "persistent distorted blame of self or others for causing the traumatic event or for resulting consequences"; and an "exaggerated startle response."¹¹⁸ In short, if one understands the Mariner to be the sole survivor of naufrage, the narrative he articulates can be seen to fulfill *all* the necessary PTSD criteria listed in the latest (fifth, 2013) edition of the *DSM*.

Psychotic experiences are also a central feature of *schizophrenic* conditions. This fact introduces a certain amount of diagnostic uncertainty. The voices of the Polar Spirit's "fellow demons," those of the pilot, pilot's boy and hermit, that of the Wedding Guest and even that of the framing balladeer can all be diagnosed as elements of the Mariner's psychosis. The voice of the glossist, I suggest, serves the important function of locating the Mariner's account as a negotiable but elusive document: pathological "history." One also needs to bring to bear on any clinical diagnosis of these conditions a host of "predisposing factors." We have clear evidence for one of these in the case of the Mariner: the superstition of both his historical period and his profession. In addition, the effects of dehydration and starvation may also have caused a delirium (acute organic psychosis) which could itself be traumatic, and which is then recalled delusionally.¹¹⁹

Contemporary trauma theory further illuminates the links between the Mariner's psychological predicament, the reader's experience of the poems' challenging aporiae, and the "insistent reenactments" that constitute the poem's revisions through time. Cathy Caruth notes that such compulsive

115. Wilbur J. Scott, "PTSD in DSM-III: A Case in the Politics of Diagnosis," *Social Problems* 37, no. 4 (August 1990): 294; Caruth, *Trauma*, 3.

116. See Scott, "PTSD in DSM-III," 294.

117. I quote the diagnostic criteria from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.), accessed 20 January 2015, http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/PTSD-overview/dsm5_criteria_ptsd.asp.

118. *DSM*, 5th ed.

119. I am grateful to Professor Sir Michael J. Owen, Director of the Institute of Psychological Medicine and Clinical Neurosciences at Cardiff University, for discussions from which this diagnosis was constructed.

rehearsals of the past “do not simply serve as testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred.”¹²⁰ Caruth quotes Greenberg and van der Kolk’s formulation, “pathologies of memory,” to define this enactment of a trauma that was itself not fully intelligible at the time. This goes beyond “psychogenic amnesia.” It bespeaks a repeated trauma in which “the [originary] event cannot become, as [Pierre] Janet says, a ‘narrative memory’ that is integrated into a completed story of the past.” Rather, it must remain

a history that literally *has no place*, neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and enactments are not fully understood . . . the trauma seems to evoke the difficult truth of a history that is constituted by the very incomprehensibility of its occurrence.¹²¹

Trauma here is (among other things) a historicist crux. Such a theory gives us valuable purchase on the Mariner’s (repeated) attempts to interpret his past. It also serves to describe not only the “histories” of the poem itself, but also those of our own critical negotiations with its multiple enactments and, indeed, those of Coleridge’s own troubled returns to a poem in which a complex of family loss, death by water, and the condition of writing is re-enacted. These are likewise histories that are constituted by acts of necessarily imperfect “witness” to initial encounters that were “never fully experienced as [they] occurred.”

Dominick LaCapra speaks of the victim’s “fidelity to trauma, a feeling that one must somehow keep faith with it”; one’s “bond with the dead . . . may invest trauma with value and make its reliving a painful but necessary commemoration.”¹²² The Mariner—and the revising Coleridge himself—seem categorically to demonstrate such an investment in trauma, both as the ground of identity and as guilt-ridden commemoration: “The many men so beautiful” (1798, 238). Writing (movingly) about the challenges of writing (movingly) about real-life traumatic events, LaCapra outlines a concept that carries particular resonance in the context of “The Ancient Mariner” and its multiple revisions. It is a concept that allows us to identify Coleridge *as a writer of and on trauma* and “The Ancient Mariner” as an imaginative codification of a syndrome—PTSD—that is emphatically not the linguistic and cultural construction of a later era. LaCapra remarks:

120. Caruth, *Trauma*, 151.

121. Caruth, *Trauma*, 153.

122. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 22.

Being responsive to the traumatic experience of others . . . implies not the appropriation of their experience, but what I would call empathetic unsettlement, which should have stylistic effects or, more broadly, effects in writing which cannot be reduced to formulas or rules of method . . . empathetic unsettlement poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme stress from which we attempt to derive reassurance or benefit.¹²³

The notion of "empathetic unsettlement" is of service in understanding the radical indeterminacies of Coleridge's poem outlined at the beginning of this essay. Those very ambiguities, which compel the kind of hybrid intervention I have offered, are part, I suggest, of Coleridge's remarkably prescient acknowledgement of the "difficult problems in representation" that the traumatic subject poses, and of the sensitivity with which "any dialogic exchange"¹²⁴ with a past wound—the literal meaning of "trauma"—needs to be negotiated. The paradigmatic resistance of "The Ancient Mariner" to the closure of (crypto) totalizing readings (like mine) represents a form of "empathetic unsettlement."

Coleridgean indeterminacy, I argue, can also help us resist—or at least trouble—the voyeuristic propensities of our contemporary "wound culture" (Mark Seltzer's phrase to describe a "pathological public sphere" marked by a "collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound").¹²⁵ Moreover, Coleridge's revisions to the poem may be considered in a similar light, in other words, as a way of resisting closure and the harmonization it implies. Some critics have lamented the superimposition of the gloss and the subtle degothicization of the poem (in terms of both language and imagery) from 1798 onwards. What those acts of revision constitute, however, is a *desire to keep the Mariner's wound open* in the face of simplifying (psychological, hermeneutic) "cures." LaCapra's "jeopardy" identifies the paradoxically salutary condition into which the (traumatically necessary) act of revision throws the inherited text.

LaCapra's insights can be pushed further. Carl Thompson comments that the Mariner as "fictive voyager" "takes his place among all the factual voyagers and maritime misadventurers—Newton, Shelvocke, John Byron—who haunted the Romantic imagination."¹²⁶ Consciously—and repeatedly—dramatizing the trauma of a fictive voyager, seeking the "sty-

123. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 41.

124. LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 41.

125. See Seltzer, "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere," *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 3–26.

126. Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 59, 105.

listic effects” and “effects in writing” (LaCapra’s phrases) that would serve as the vehicles of an empathetic unsettlement, Coleridge can also be understood to be keeping open a form of personal trauma induced by that very act of reading about, imagining, and then writing, others’ traumatic experiences. In this sense, the negotiated trauma is also that of Britain’s contemporary maritime culture as a whole, which, as Thompson reminds us, confronted “its greatest nightmare” in naufrage.¹²⁷

The above analysis allows us to see that “The Ancient Mariner” does not, *pace* Wordsworth, stand outside the wider programs and agendas of *Lyrical Ballads*. To read the poem as a traumatized recalling of naufrage emphasizes how crucial a role “The Ancient Mariner” plays in two of the principal projects of *Lyrical Ballads*: the privileging of psychology over sensationalism, and the exploration of the breach between event and narration, “history” and its writing. We might also radically reconsider the links that commentators have noted between “The Ancient Mariner” and that other lyrical ballad narrated by a sailor—“The Thorn”—in which the dramatic monologue is deployed to strip away gothic overlay to reveal a core human tragedy.¹²⁸ And crucially, one might also reassess the perceived relegation of “The Ancient Mariner” from the opening salvo in 1798 to the penultimate position in the first volume of the 1800, 1802 and 1805 *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth’s uppity note notwithstanding, this is no simple demotion. The poem took its place immediately before “Tintern Abbey”—that tidal poem that is, as I have argued elsewhere, a naufrage poem manqué, written in the main on the switchback waters of the Severn estuary, a poem that frets constantly about depths and the need for anchors.¹²⁹ Thus *Lyrical Ballads* invites the reader to consider the links, not the disjunctions, between the naufrage ballad and the blank verse “ode” (as Wordsworth saw his poem). At different scalar levels, both concern the trauma of history-as-event, and the compulsive need to rehearse it.

At the end of his study of the “formative nostalgias” of Victorian fiction, Nicholas Dames emphasizes that the construction in nineteenth-century narrative of “[a] mode of memory” that “effaces traumas” and “wills a disconnection from the past” so successfully as to become “a mode of imagination,” is now the very habit and condition of our contemporary encounters with “the Victorian” and with fiction generally. Dames dubs that condition “nostalgic reading.”¹³⁰ What I have sought to enact in the pres-

127. Thompson, *Romantic-Era Shipwreck Narratives*, 3–4.

128. See Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*, 286–87 and Thompson, *Suffering Traveller*, 103.

129. See Damian Walford Davies, “Romantic Hydrography: Tide and Transit in ‘Tintern Abbey,’” in *English Romantic Writers and the West Country*, ed. Nicholas Roe (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010), 218–36.

130. Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 74, 237.

ent essay is a habit of *traumatic reading*. This is a critical method (allied in obvious ways to procedures in Romantic New Historicism's past) that is not confined to the identification of (*and with*) pre-nineteenth-century traumatized subjectivities. It is also concerned to reveal how deeply constitutive of the Romantic literary text are its pathologies of memory, and the range of wounds that mark the difference between event and subsequent telling.

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