

Neal B. Houston

## FLETCHER CHRISTIAN AND "THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER"

"DAEMONS, AND SPECTRES, and angels, and *revenants*" haunted the Ancient Mariner's voyage, but a more earthly figure haunted the mind of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the creation of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"—Fletcher Christian, the celebrated instigator of the *Bounty* mutiny. One needs only to return to Coleridge's notebooks to conjecture that the poet was thinking of Christian when he wrote the poem, for the enigmatic entry, "Adventures of *Christian*, the MUTINEER",<sup>1</sup> written by Coleridge between 1795 and 1798, is one of the most significant clues to the riddle of "The Ancient Mariner". Yet, it is one of the least examined keys used to understand the poem.

The objectives of this article are to examine a conventional interpretation of this entry, to contrast it with some of the early writing on the subject by John Livingston Lowes and some later writing by C. S. Wilkinson, and, finally, to explore the extraordinary ways in which the probable return of Fletcher Christian influenced the creation of the poem itself.

In his study of symbolism in literature, Kenneth Burke provides a psychological interpretation of the notebook entry; he judges the statement as a contribution to the analysis of the marriage problem of Coleridge and his wife Sarah:

And we might introduce one last correlation: among Coleridge's notes taken when he was planning the poem that became "The Ancient Mariner", there is a note that punningly suggests a different kind of Christian: "Christian, the MUTINEER" (the capitalization is Coleridge's). Taking all these points together, do we not find good cause to line up, as one strand in the symbolic action of the poem, a sequence from the marriage problem, . . . through the murder of the Albatross as a synecdochic representative of Sarah, to the "blessing" of the snakes that synecdochically represented the drug and the impulsive premarital aesthetic (belonging in a contrary cluster) to an explicit statement of preference for church, prayer, and companionship over marriage (with the Mariner return-

ing to shore under the aegis of the praying Hermit, and the poem itself ending on the prayerful, moralizing note that has annoyed many readers as a change in quality)?<sup>2</sup>

When Burke's symbolic interpretation is compared with an entire volume on Fletcher Christian's return to England and with the discussion of Coleridge's notebook entry in Lowe's *The Road to Xanadu*, evidence can be found to negate the validity of this, as well as of similar interpretations. From this negation arises another approach to the study of "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner".

C. S. Wilkinson's *The Wake of the Bounty*<sup>3</sup> was published four years before Burke's revised edition; its implications for the poem are extensive. Wilkinson's study of the relation between the *Bounty* mutiny and eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English literature is of profound interest to the scholar, for Wilkinson has correctly assumed that academicians are not disposed to connect a romantic ballad such as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" with such a base and ungentlemanly event as the seizure of a royal ship in the South Seas, a mutiny which, according to William Bligh, was induced by the mutineers' haunting memories of the easy women of pristine Tahiti.<sup>4</sup>

Early in his book Wilkinson explains that his search for a solution to unraveling the mystery of the chief mutineer began when he found a letter signed "F. Christian", from the address of "Portnessock", dated some years after Christian was reported dead. From this point of departure Wilkinson explores the many intriguing relationships that linked Fletcher Christian with William Wordsworth, and Wordsworth with Coleridge. Wilkinson asserts that Christian escaped from Pitcairn Island some time around 1794 and arrived in England in 1795. He was subsequently reported as being seen in 1808 or 1809 by William Heywood, a former midshipman on the *Bounty*.<sup>5</sup> Christian had powerful friends and relatives in England, and Wilkinson believes that they exerted great efforts to conceal his presence. After his return, Fletcher Christian was believed to be hidden in the northwest section of Cumberland and to be living around Wigtonshire or Dumfriesshire. Wilkinson also believes that he was probably engaged in maritime traffic at Anthonne in the Lake Country.

Wilkinson maintains that the person who suggested to Coleridge that Christian be used as a model for "The Ancient Mariner" must fulfill two conditions: (1) he must be in close contact with the mutineer so as to be trusted with the story of his return, and (2) he must be on intimate terms with Coleridge. Obviously, writes Wilkinson, William Wordsworth fulfills both

conditions, for he was a schoolmate of Fletcher Christian, had close ties with the Christian family, and was originally a collaborator with Coleridge in planning "The Ancient Mariner". Wilkinson also supplies some information to the effect that a meeting took place between Christian and Coleridge in Nether Stowey at the time Coleridge and Wordsworth had taken up residence there; he notes that Dr. Fisher, the Rector of Nether Stowey, was a friend of the Law family and a witness to barrister Edward Christian's capable defence of his brother, Fletcher Christian. Wilkinson also connects Coleridge's suppression of the 1801 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* with a desire to conceal Christian's residence in England; and he states that Sir John Barrow's authoritative book on the mutiny, *The Eventful History of the Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of H.M.S. Bounty*, was written at the suggestion of William Sotheby, translator of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* and a friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge, who frequently received him as a guest.<sup>6</sup>

Even earlier than Wilkinson, John Livingston Lowes recognized, but did not fully explore, the possibility that Christian may have played an important, imaginative role in Coleridge's writing of the poem. Professor Lowes discussed several entries concerning the voyage of the *Bounty*, from Coleridge's notebook, which was begun in the spring of 1795 and completed in 1798.<sup>7</sup> Yet, again, the most important discussion is centred on the twenty-second topic. Lowes' statement bears no resemblance at all to Burke's discussion of the notebook entry:

The twenty-second topic, however, sets its sails for the unknown seas. It has to do with an event of surpassing contemporary interest, the thrilling story of the mutiny on H.M.S. *Bounty*, off the Friendly Islands in 1789:

22. Adventures of Christian,<sup>8</sup> the Mutineer.—<sup>9</sup>

Fletcher Christian, the leader of the mutineers, after setting the commander, Lieutenant Bligh, and eighteen officers and men adrift in an open boat, sailed off the map in the *Bounty*. The rest, save for Lieutenant Bligh's report, was silence. And Christian's actual adventures remained utterly unknown, except for a rumour in 1809, until, twenty-five years after the mutiny, a colony of the descendants of the mutineers was discovered on an island in the remote South Seas.<sup>10</sup> Then Byron, with his hawk's eye for romance, seized on the tale, and wrote "The Island." But Coleridge, like his contemporaries, could only guess. And we, in turn, can only wonder what part his inspired surmises may later have played in the adventures of the ancient Mariner in these same seas. At all events, there was at least one sentence in Bligh's matter-of-fact narrative which must have leaped from the page as Coleridge read—a sentence opposite which in the margin we can almost see him noting (as he noted once before): "The philosophy of this." "When they were forcing me out of the ship", wrote Bligh, "I

asked him [Christian], if this treatment was a proper return for the many instances he had received of my friendship? he appeared disturbed at my question, and answered with much emotion, 'That,—Captain Bligh,—that is the thing;—I am in hell—I am in hell.'"<sup>11</sup> The adventures of Christian the mutineer, as Coleridge conceived them, may well have been, like those of the guilt-haunted Mariner himself, the adventures of "a soul in agony."<sup>12</sup>

Or conversely—considering the unheralded return of Christian and the possible knowledge Coleridge had of this return through his friend Wordsworth before Coleridge wrote "The Ancient Mariner"—the adventures of the ancient Mariner may well have been like those of the guilt-haunted Christian himself.

In any event, Coleridge's Notebook entry, "Adventures of *Christian*, the MUTINEER", does not concern itself with supplying evidence about the doleful state of Coleridge's marriage with Sarah. Though his approach is less scholarly, Wilkinson comes closer to the truth than does Burke in his marriage analogy. In the light of Wilkinson's research, five distinct areas and themes of "The Ancient Mariner" emerge as worthy of consideration in determining the influence of Christian on Coleridge's creative imagination: (1) the Argument, (2) the "guilt-haunted mariner himself", (3) linguistic items, (4) the "Life-in-Death" sequence, and (5) the moral of the poem.

## I

The Argument of the original edition of "The Ancient Mariner" presents a rather singular and significant analogy in that it seems to compare the route of the Ancient Mariner with that of a real-life mariner:

How a Ship having passed the line was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical Latitude of the Great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancvent Marinere came back to his own Country.

Lowes, in his second and last reference to Bligh, assesses the Argument: "That might have been a ship of Drake, or Le Maire, or Roggeveen, or Cook, or Bligh."<sup>13</sup> Yet, any attempt to analogize the Argument with the route and return of Bligh falls short of harmonious completion. Bligh never returned in the *Bounty*, nor, most certainly, did Fletcher Christian; however, a reasonable answer to the puzzle emerges when the circumstances of the two men, after the mutiny, are compared.

Bligh sailed the *Bounty* from Portsmouth Harbor to Cape Horn, stopping at Teneriffe off the northwest coast of Africa. Unable to navigate the

harsh, storm-ridden seas around Cape Horn, he turned the *Bounty* in the direction of the Cape of Good Hope, travelling northeast to the Cape and thence to Adventure Bay in southern Australia and the South Seas, finally arriving safely at Tahiti.<sup>14</sup> It was after leaving Tahiti, near the island of Tofua, that Christian and the other mutineers seized the ship. Christian, utilizing his talents as an expert navigator, sailed to remote Pitcairn—despite the island being incorrectly charted—where the *Bounty* was scuttled to avoid detection by passing ships. (It may be recalled here, that Coleridge fondly referred to his Mariner as the "Old Navigator").<sup>15</sup>

Bligh, travelling in Dutch ships, made his way back to England, and after the inquiry was made into the events of the *Bounty* mutiny, the *Pandora*, under Captain Edward Edwards, was dispatched to bring the mutineers back to England. Upon her return the *Pandora* was shipwrecked and many of her crew, and some prisoner-mutineers who had been found at Tahiti, were lost at sea. The *Pandora* had a complement of 160 men.<sup>16</sup> The *Bounty* had forty-six.<sup>17</sup> Indirectly, the mutiny aboard the *Bounty*, led by Christian, affected, jeopardized, or destroyed a total of 206 men, or, as it may be noted from "The Ancient Mariner", approximately "Four times fifty living men."

Bligh, having returned to England, was not looked upon by the public as a guilty man, nor was he one to go about the country teaching his tale with "strange power of speech." The imaginative ship of the Argument is therefore more like Christian's than Bligh's; although it is not known exactly how Christian returned to England, it is a reasonable conjecture that he bore an overpowering sense of guilt. Christian, among all men of his decade, would have been looked upon as "romantic" by Coleridge;<sup>18</sup> and if Coleridge knew Christian before he wrote his masterpiece, Coleridge would *have* to cloak his model in poetic imagination and supernatural machinery in order not to endanger a man who walked England under the sentence of death.

## II

Closely related to the Argument of "The Ancient Mariner" and the guilt of the Ancient Mariner himself is the actual guilt of Fletcher Christian. Christian, probably the foremost offender against the king in Coleridge's day, was a gentleman who, by his own admission at the hour of mutiny, was mentally cognizant of his usurpation of established authority. His statement to Bligh, as he was forcing Bligh off the *Bounty*, brings his sense of guilt sharply into focus: "That,—Captain Bligh,—that is the thing;—I am in hell—I am in

hell." On his return to England, it is a certainty that Christian became isolated from the mainstream of humanity, just as the Ancient Mariner, who, in his penance—like the Wandering Jew—had ample time to reflect upon his past sin and his own reprehensibility. Like the Mariner, Christian was "a soul in agony", having come to this end by an act that was also like the act of the Mariner—an act begun in impetuosity and ending in isolation. Cyprian A. G. Bridge writes, "Fletcher Christian's starting a mutiny was undoubtedly an act of madness, because it was the act of a man maddened by the conditions on board the ship combined with Bligh's brutal and intolerable tyranny."<sup>19</sup>

Although his act was an act of madness, Christian was not to be excused under the traditions and laws of the British navy. From the time of Richard I the infamous Laws of Oleron had set the precedent for the punishment of the offence of mutiny. In this "Black Book" of the Admiralty—unofficial and secret, but known to the king's commanders—it was written that one who draws his sword on the master of an English vessel would have his right hand nailed to the mast of the ship.<sup>20</sup> In the same tradition, official navy law stated that the mutineer "shall suffer death." When Captain Edwards of the *Pandora* sailed from England to fetch Christian, there was high indignation against Christian,<sup>21</sup> for he, in raising his hand against Bligh—no matter how tyrannical Bligh may have been—raised his hand against the authority of the king. (The Ancient Mariner killed the albatross and violated a symbol of the order of nature.) In rebelling against the king, Fletcher Christian sinned against the law of God and violated a biblical injunction still strong in England at the time, an injunction that would explain Christian's statement that he was "in hell":

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.<sup>22</sup>

Coleridge has imparted in "The Ancient Mariner" the divine nature of the albatross:

At length did cross an Albatross,  
Thorough the fog it came;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name.

The similarity between the guilt of Christian and that of the Ancient Mariner

now becomes evident: the crime is one against God and nature, and one that involves the very soul of the criminal.

After the Mariner blesses the water-snakes, the albatross falls into the sea. The voices in the air question one another on the magnitude of the Mariner's crime:

"Is it he?" quoth one, "Is this the man?  
By him who died on cross,  
With his cruel bow he laid full low  
The harmless Albatross . . . ."

The Mariner is compelled to do more penance, and when the ship begins its journey back to his home country, the Mariner feels, as Christian must have felt, the utter isolation and fear engendered by his act:

Like one that on a lonesome road  
Doth walk in fear and dread,  
And having once turned round walks on,  
And turns no more his head;  
Because he knows, a frightful fiend  
Doth close behind him tread.

On his return to his native country, the agony of his guilt returns, and the Mariner is compelled to expiate that guilt which seems always to be with him:

I pass, like night, from land to land;  
I have strange power of speech;  
That moment that his face I see,  
I know the man that must hear me:  
To him my tale I teach.

When the knowledge is kept in mind that Christian's return was "highly probable",<sup>23</sup> the perceptive words of Lowes (who did not admit any knowledge of Christian's return to England) become even more meaningful: "The adventures of Christian the mutineer, as Coleridge conceived them, may well have been, like those of the guilt-haunted Mariner himself, the adventures of 'a soul in agony'."

Both the public and Captain Bligh had made Fletcher Christian a villain in the strictest sense of the word. Sir John Barrow writes of the public's reaction: "The tide of public applause set as strongly in favour of Bligh, on account of his sufferings and the successful issue of his daring enterprise, as its indignation was launched against Christian and his associates, for the audacious and criminal deed they had committed".<sup>24</sup> Although Edward Christian, the brother of Fletcher and a first-rate advocate of the law, later published a



documentary study of the mutiny that severely damaged Bligh's account, it was not until 1831 that Barrow published, anonymously at first, his devastating indictment of Bligh as the primary cause of the tragic affair. Until then, the guilt for the great mutiny lay, in the eyes of the public, on the shoulders of Fletcher Christian. No doubt Coleridge possessed this conventional attitude in the years following the mutiny in 1789. But when the *Lyrical Ballads* appeared in 1798, Coleridge had achieved a penetrating insight, as well as a sympathetic interest, into the nature and the understanding of the guilt of the Ancient Mariner; it appears that he covertly knew more about the subject than the ordinary citizen, and knew enough about Christian's guilt so that the "hooks and eyes" of his imagination would reflect the psychology of the guilt in the lines of the poem itself.

### III

There is a strong possibility that Coleridge is introducing the identity of Christian into certain stanzas of "The Ancient Mariner" through the use of subtle linguistic items. These are concealed in various passages and occur from time to time throughout the poem. The first item may be found in the beginning of the Mariner's description of his departure, the sixth stanza of Part I. An interesting use of the word "kirk" is revealed:

The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,  
Merrily did we drop  
Below the kirk, below the hill,  
Below the lighthouse top.

"Kirk", of course, is the Scottish word for *church*, and Coleridge appears to be using it for purposes of location, as though to announce that the Mariner is in some way associated with a Scottish location, or, at least, is connected with an English location that has been marked by strong Scottish influence. Had Coleridge used *church* in this stanza, the rhyme, rhythm, meter, and meaning would not have been significantly altered. At the end of the poem, in Part VI, stanza fifteen, the Mariner returns to his "own countree", the same place from where he had begun—identified by the lighthouse top, the hill, and the kirk. Coleridge uses "kirk" four times in the poem, but *church* is not once mentioned.

Here, it should be remembered that Christian was a Manxman, from the Isle of Man, the island off the west coast of England, near the Lake District town of Cocker-mouth. It was in Cocker-mouth that Wordsworth and Chris-



tian attended school together, just a stone's throw from the Scottish border. It also should be noted that, in Wilkinson's account, Christian was reported to have been living in Scotland, near Dumfriesshire, after his return from Pitcairn's Island. If Coleridge intends to say, by the use of the aberrant word "kirk", that the Mariner returns to a Scottish location, he could not have said it better than to fix the location by means of the use of this Scottish term in the otherwise characteristically "English" vocabulary of the poem.

It is possible that the Albatross represents another subliminal reference. It is by no means unusual in Celtic literature for the souls of men to be identified with birds. It is sufficient to say here that the soul of the Mariner finds identification in the form of the albatross. When the Mariner kills the bird, he is, in a sense, placing his own soul in jeopardy; for the bird has been hailed "in God's name", as if it were "a Christian soul." It is not an impossibility that Coleridge was outwardly calling the bird a representative of God, but was also covertly expressing the actual name of the Mariner without disclosing that it was Fletcher Christian. Even the invocation by the spectral voice, "by him who died on cross", might be taken to imply that Coleridge is personalizing the name "Christian" and that the name does not apply to Christians as a body, but to the Mariner, or Fletcher Christian, whose name is derived from the name of "him who died on cross." Finally, is it entirely beyond chance that Coleridge uses the cross-bow as the lethal weapon of stanza twenty, Part I?

"God save thee, ancient Mariner!  
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—  
Why look'st thou so?"—With my cross-bow  
I shot the ALBATROSS.

The word "fletcher" is the archaic word for "One who makes or deals in arrows" or "one who makes bows and arrows."<sup>25</sup> The use of this word, when seen in relation to the linguistic items involving the name of "Christian", may suggest that Coleridge seems determined to reveal the identity of the Mariner, who is a "Fletcher" as well as a "Christian."

## IV

When the Ancient Mariner kills the albatross and the ship appears with its spectral women, DEATH and LIFE-IN-DEATH, the Mariner describes the hideous appearance of LIFE-IN-DEATH:

*Her lips were red, her looks were free,  
Her locks were yellow as gold:  
Her skin was as white as leprosy,  
The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,  
Who thicks man's blood with cold.*

The Mariner recognizes the nature of LIFE-IN-DEATH, "Who thicks man's blood with cold." This nightmarish nature later becomes the actual fact of his existence. LIFE-IN-DEATH wins the toss of dice and, in doing so, wins the Mariner:

*The Naked hulk alongside came,  
And the twain were casting dice;  
'The game is done! I've won! I've won!'  
Quoth she, and whistles thrice.*

Is this but another means for Coleridge to say that Christian has been given a life-in-death sentence over the death that has supposedly been his fate? Wilkinson's evidence of the return of Christian, and the subsequent discussion of his activities in England, lend credence to the idea that he did lead a life-in-hiding though ostensibly he was dead to the world. Because LIFE-IN-DEATH triumphs over DEATH in the poem, the Mariner, like Christian, has the opportunity to redeem himself.

A recent article by J. W. R. Purser inadvertently strengthens the analogy of the Mariner with Fletcher Christian. Purser states that the leading theme of the poem is the description of the Mariner's life-in-death; he adds, parenthetically, that "the figure Life-in-Death—though of course she is present in the 1798 version—was first named in that of 1817, presumably to make the idea more apparent."<sup>26</sup> Therefore, Coleridge, nearly twenty years after the writing of the poem, considered this sequence as a major theme and meant to emphasize the fact that Mariner inexorably existed in a life-in-death.

Purser also states that the whole crew is implicated in the death of its heavenly visitant, but that the Mariner is reserved for a greater punishment (as well as a greater privilege—that of wandering and professing his guilt), the punishment of having to reluctantly endure a life-in-death. Purser believes, on the basis of the poem itself, that the only way to live a life-in-death is by subordination of self and selfish interests to love.<sup>27</sup>

In a later article, Florence Marsh discusses the Mariner's ocean as a wasteland similar to the wasteland of T. S. Eliot and believes that "The Ancient Mariner", in addition to being a poem about crime and expiation, is also a journey of psychic exploration where the natural and the symbolic co-exist. Marsh agrees with George Whalley's comment that the Mariner has committed a crime against his own soul as well as against Nature and the external order of the universe.<sup>28</sup> Marsh cites Graham Hough in *The Romantic Poets* and agrees with his supposition that the crew is not interested in the bird itself, but only in its use.<sup>29</sup> The Mariner's condemnation (or redemption) to a Life-in-Death ("My soul in agony") is seen by Marsh, concurring with Whalley, as the "misère de l'homme sans Dieu"—suggesting that the Mariner's own soul is in danger. The sheer hopelessness of the Mariner is shown when he is unable to pray. With his blessing of the least of God's creatures, the water-snakes, the Mariner is able to achieve rebirth. Moreover, Marsh believes that Coleridge has recognized a psychological rebirth in the character of the Mariner, in much the same way that the psychologist William James has recognized the capability of some men to emerge "twice-born" from peril, to achieve serenity and faith.<sup>30</sup>

Such articles, typical of those dealing recently with the commitment of the Mariner to Life-in-Death, provide insight and perception into the significance of the Mariner's crime, the nature of his punishment, the role of the crew, the Mariner's divorcement from God, and the rebirth of the Mariner in penance; however, these symbolic entities exist in a poetic vacuum and are concerned only with the imaginative and supernatural experience of the Mariner of the poem. They lack, above all, the referent of a historical figure, indigenous to Coleridge's time and environment, who has lived a life-in-death and who has lost his soul, perhaps only to find it. The critical elements mentioned above would fall into a more complete pattern if, for a moment, disbelief were suspended and the belief considered that it was Coleridge's intention to write of a person who had actually experienced the calamity and conflict that later plagued the Mariner of the poem. Such an intention is not counter to Coleridge's statement in the *Biographia Literaria* concerning the inception of "The Ancient Mariner". He and Wordsworth intended to choose subjects on a "supernatural" level and subjects from "ordinary life."<sup>31</sup>

Fletcher Christian, believed dead and under sentence of death, undoubtedly lived under tremendous restriction and secrecy. Denied the association of men at large and beset with psychological problems rising from living such a mode of existence, Christian was indeed a "soul in agony" and a tor-

tured man who lived a life-in-death. It is not surprising that Coleridge, with his meditative and feeling mind, should find occasion to consider Christian—even six years after the mutiny had occurred—as a source when, in 1795, he made his notebook entry, “Adventures of *Christian*, the MUTINEER.”

## V

Because “The Ancient Mariner” is primarily an excursion into the supernatural, much conjecture is left in the mind of the reader as to whether or not a moral exists. Six lines in the conclusion of the poem have been the basis for the critical discussion of a moral:

He prayeth well, who loveth well  
Both men and bird or 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.

Raysor points out that Coleridge’s famous statement to Mrs. Barbauld—“I ought not to have stopped to give reasons for things, or inculcate humanity to beasts”—is a “debater’s evasion of the issue”, and that Mrs. Barbauld was probably correct in thinking that the entire moral structure of guilt and redemption was to be found in these lines.<sup>32</sup> Raysor relates this moral tag to the structure of the poem: “The moral principle as a principle or cause of action is exactly what gives ‘The Ancient Mariner’ its structure as a narrative and gives it an advantage over ‘Kubla Khan’ and ‘Christabel.’”<sup>33</sup> In a later work, Raysor notes that there has been a strong tendency in recent years to emphasize this moral interpretation of “The Ancient Mariner”, bringing it into harmony with Coleridge’s early philosophy and thus diverging it from the study by Lowes.<sup>34</sup>

A moral interpretation, when thought of in relation to the events surrounding Christian and his instigation of the mutiny, does not radically depart from other existing evaluations of a moral in “The Ancient Mariner”. The moral is still one of guilt and redemption, but Christian’s adventures give it a reasonable, believable, and true quality.

It may be recalled that Christian’s act directly, and catastrophically, affected the lives of some two hundred men; that he was an active offender against the authority of the King; that in Bligh’s account Christian likened

himself to being "in hell" at the time of the mutiny; that he was under the sentence of death and isolated from contact with the life he had formerly known; that at the time of Coleridge's writing of the poem, there was still the belief in the minds of the public that Christian was entirely at fault for the mutiny; and, as it has been stated, that Christian's experience relegated him to a veritable life-in-death. Such information about Christian, most likely known to Coleridge, provided a perfect framework for the moral of "guilt and redemption", and would have forced Coleridge to assume a public attitude toward the moral that, indeed, would be an "evasion of the issue." Vicariously, Coleridge was witness to the experience of the most famed mutineer of the day. As a borrower and a plagiarist,<sup>35</sup> Coleridge would not hesitate to provide his own interpretation of this experience and fashion a moral parallel to the guilt of Christian, who, in Coleridge's mind and imagination, resembled Cain and the Wandering Jew.<sup>36</sup>

Raysor's statement that the moral principle provides the narrative structure for "The Ancient Mariner" prompts a final return to the Argument of the poem. The Argument divides the tale into three structural parts: (1) the journey to the "Great Pacific Ocean", (2) "the strange things that befell" the Mariner, and (3) the Mariner's return to his "own Country". In like manner, the poem follows this pattern: the journey begins in reality, passes to the supernatural, and ends, once again, in reality, as the Mariner concludes his tale and provides the moral of love to the wedding-guest.

Had not Coleridge known of the adventures of Christian, the mutineer, there would likely be no moral to the poem. Simply, the poem could have ended at the close of the second structural part, the supernatural experiences of the Mariner. But, in adding the third structural part, Coleridge brings the Mariner back to reality and justifies the moral by placing it in a realistic frame of reference. He also makes "The Ancient Mariner" the only one of his "great" poems to achieve structural completion. Ergo, the moral is a real one. The Mariner's "guilt and redemption" is the guilt and redemption Christian must have experienced, and it underlies the overt moral principle of the poem.

The identification of the *Bounty* with the imaginative ship of the Argument, of Christian with the "guilt-haunted Mariner himself" who exists in a life-in-death, of Christian as the subject of the linguistic references, and of Christian's experience as the source of the moral, is not to say that he is the only source for the poem. Other adventurers and adventures, real or imagined,

arise from Coleridge's capacious reading and experience—as Lowes has shown in *The Road to Xanadu*<sup>37</sup>—and hide themselves in his works.

With the exception of *The Wake of the Bounty*, however, nothing, to this writer's knowledge, has been published suggesting Fletcher Christian as an actual model for the Ancient Mariner. Wilkinson's major interest is the proof of Christian's return to England, and he leaves attempts at interpretation of the poem itself to others.

All in all, it appears that Coleridge did have peculiar knowledge of Christian and that this knowledge provided him with valuable material for a great poem that was not only a "mere" poem, but something that "grew and grew and became important." As Coleridge wrote a few years after the completion of "The Ancient Mariner",

It is easy to clothe imaginary beings with our own thoughts and feelings; but to send ourselves out of ourselves into the thoughts and feelings of beings in circumstances wholly and strangely different from our own, *hic labor hoc opus*: and who has achieved it? Perhaps only Shakespeare.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps also Coleridge.

#### NOTES

1. Fol. 25b; *Archiv*, p. 354.
2. *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, Revised Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), p. 61.
3. London: Cassell, 1953.
4. *The Mutiny on Board H.M.S. Bounty* (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 140.
5. For an account, see Sir John Barrow, *The Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of H.M.S. Bounty*, CXCIV of *The World's Classics* (London, 1944), pp. 327-328.
6. Wilkinson, p. 3 ff.
7. John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton-Mifflin, 1927), p. 5.
8. The word "Christian" is doubly underlined.
9. Fol. 25b; *Ibid.*
10. For Lieutenant Bligh's narrative, see his *Narrative of the Mutiny, on board His Majesty's Ship Bounty, and the subsequent Voyage of part of the Crew, in the Ship's Boat*, etc., 1790 (*ibid.*, with additional particulars, 1853); *An Account of the Mutinous Seizure of the Bounty, and the succeeding Hardships of the Crew*, etc. (London, 1792); and his *Voyage to the South Sea* (London, 1792), pp. 154 ff. For other accounts, see John Martin, M.D., *An Account*:

of the Natives of the Tonga Islands, compiled and arranged from the extensive communications of Mr. William Mariner (1817); Sir John Barrow, *The Eventful History of the Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of H.M.S. Bounty* (London, 1831); Walter Brodie, *Pitcairn's Island and the Islanders, in 1850* (London, 1851); Thomas Boyles Murray, *Pitcairn: The Island, the People, etc.* (London, 1858); Lady [Diana] Belcher, *The Mutineers of the Bounty* (London, 1870); Rosalind Amelia Young, *Mutiny of the Bounty and Story of Pitcairn Island, 1790-1804* (Oakland, Cal., 1895). For Byron's use of the story, see *Works of Lord Byron* (ed. E. H. Coleridge), *Poetry*, Vol. V, pp. 581-84.

11. Bligh, p. 141. The recent edition is hereafter cited for all references to William Bligh's account.
12. Lowes, pp. 27-28.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
14. Alexander McKee, *H.M.S. Bounty* (New York: William Morrow, 1963), pp. 136-137.
15. *Wordsworth's Prose Works*, ed. A. B. Grosart, Vol. III (London, 1876), pp. 16-17.
16. Barrow, p. 161.
17. Bligh, p. 15.
18. "In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*; in which it was agreed that my endeavors would 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. . . ." (emphasis mine). *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XIV.
19. Barrow, ix., Preface.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 160.
22. Romans 13:1-2.
23. McKee, p. 204. McKee is quoting Sir John Laughton writing in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.
24. p. 160.
25. Wilkinson, p. 124; see also *O.E.D.*, IV, p. 318.
26. "Interpretation of 'The Ancient Mariner.'" *The Review of English Studies*, VIII (New Series), (1957), 249.
27. *Ibid.*, 251-252.
28. "The Ocean-Desert: *The Ancient Mariner* and *The Wasteland*", *Essays in Criticism*, IX (1959), 129.
29. *Ibid.* See also Bligh, page 39; Bligh describes the crew's eating of albatrosses they have captured.
30. *Ibid.*, 129-132.
31. ". . . The thought suggested itself (to which of us I do not recollect) that a



series of poems might be composed of two sorts. In the one, the incidents and agents were to be, in part at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in *this* sense they have been to every human being who, from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency. For the second class, subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life; the characters and incidents were to be such as will be found in every village and its vicinity where there is a meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves."

32. Thomas M. Raysor, "Coleridge's Comment on the Moral of 'The Ancient Mariner,'" *Philological Quarterly*, XXXI (1952), 89.
33. *Ibid.*, 90
34. "Coleridge", *The English Romantic Poets*, ed. Thomas M. Raysor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 93; Raysor traces the major criticism on the subject of a moral from 1932 to the time of his writing. Among interpretations of the moral are those reflecting allegorical, Neo-Platonic, symbolistic, humanistic, and pantheistic approaches; none of those discussed relate the moral to an historical figure. Cf. pp. 93-99.
35. René Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism; 1750-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 151.
36. References to these two pariahs often appear in Coleridge's notebooks.
37. Lowes, xi (Preface).
38. Bernard Martin, *The Ancient Mariner and the Authentic Narrative* (London: Heinemann, 1949), p. 26; Martin is referring to Coleridge's letter to W. Sotheby, 13th July, 1802.