

HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindadeild

*”A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware”*

The Ancient Mariner’s Acceptance of the Absurd

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Julia Elisabeth Knežević

Janúar 2010

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Summary

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner by Samuel Taylor Coleridge derives much of its intricacy from its twofold setting. On the one hand the poem rests within a Christian framework, and on the other it is caught within an uncanny universe dominated by chance. The Christian background manifests itself in part by the poem's being framed by a wedding, and in part, by the three main characters' participating in a Christian discourse as a means of communication. The pagan and delirious atmosphere of *The Rime* arises through its dreamlike elements and its ambience of Greek mythology. The discrepancy between cause and effect also contributes to this atmosphere which in its disharmony with reason deserves to be called absurd.

This essay explores both of these backgrounds of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, where the first gives rise to a Scribe oriented reading of the poem, and the latter to a reading guided by the Wedding-Guest. Where interpretations focused on the Wedding-Guest tend to arrive at the absurd by the end of the poem, the reading offered in this essay will take the absurd as a point of departure.

It is through an epiphany of the absurd—or through a sudden intuitive insight into human reality as essentially absurd—that the Ancient Mariner shoots the Albatross and it is through his blessing of the water-snakes that he accepts the absurdity of life. The Mariner's experience of the absurd is discussed within a philosophical discourse of the absurd as portrayed by Albert Camus' constructive and optimistic interpretation of the myth of Sisyphus.