“FROM THY MOTHER’S ARMS”:

COLERIDGE, COLONIALISM, AND THE DOMESTIC REALM

by Christopher D. Jones

My thesis explores Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ideology through the issues of colonialism and the Romantic notions of it. I am particularly interested in Coleridge’s ideas of otherness and his attempts at the reconciliation of opposites and how this relates to issues such as slavery, feminism and British imperialism. The purpose of this paper is to look at certain strategies Coleridge used in order to write about reform. I wish to look closely at Coleridge's portrayal of the domestic space, a place where virtue, especially feminine virtue was assumed to dwell. My goal is to analyze how a domestic ideology influences Coleridge's work. In many of his writings he portrays the domestic realm, sometimes indirectly, as a last stronghold that rigorously upheld moral truths. However, like his personal household, the state of Coleridge's imagined domestic realm is constantly fluctuating.
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COLERIDGE, COLONIALISM, AND THE DOMESTIC REALM

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Introduction

No stranger to the effects of Empire, Coleridge not only read countless seafaring and colonial accounts, but he also obtained firsthand experience of colonialism when he took the position of public secretary in Malta (1-63, Holmes, *Darker Visions*). In focusing on Coleridge, I plan to analyze several poems, along with some of his prose, which deal specifically with the ideas of slavery, gender and the question of Coleridge’s place in relation to colonialism.

In this study of Coleridge’s writings about colonialism, issues of race and gender, I shall not prove that he was for or against colonialism, as that is a complicated issue. He wrote against colonial expansionism, but he, along with Robert Southey, formulated a plan to form his own colony, a “pantisocracy.” Coleridge did not concern himself primarily with colonialism. His concern seemed more centered on the state of England. Coleridge's creative energies often seem to focus on creating an ideal nation, whether it be from the elimination of colonial cruelty such as slavery, or the creation of an entirely new nation, his Pantisocracy, where England's corruption could not carry over. The purpose of this paper is to look at certain strategies Coleridge used in order to write about reform. I wish to look closely at Coleridge's portrayal of the domestic space, a place where virtue, especially feminine virtue was assumed to dwell. My goal is to analyze how a domestic ideology influences Coleridge's work.

Charlotte Sussman offers this definition of domestic ideology:

Feminist accounts of the period 1740-1840 have been reconceptualized and reinvigorated recently by attention to the category of domesticity. Domestic ideology, according to Nancy Armstrong, posited that the private sphere of the household ‘recentered the scattered community at myriad points to form the nuclear family, a social organization with a mother rather than a father at its center.’ In this dynamic, the woman who inhabited the leisured private space of the home was granted jurisdiction over moral questions. This woman was likely to be white, middle class, religious and sympathetic to abolitionist appeals. Indeed, in the debates over slavery, women were able to draw on the ideology of separate spheres to forge a new kind of political voice for themselves. (7)

While I am not arguing that Coleridge adopts, or even directly supports a female political voice, I feel that he was aware of the above idea of the shifting focus of the domestic realm. In many of his writings he portrays the domestic realm, sometimes indirectly, as a last stronghold that
rigorously upheld moral truths. However, like his personal household, the state of Coleridge's imagined domestic realm is fluctuating, and his depiction of this realm sometimes even seems insincere, such as in his domestic portrait, "Frost at Midnight," and in the attempts of the Mariner to reintegrate himself into society by attempting to crash a wedding, the birthplace of a new domestic realm. It also seems that he was not quite comfortable with the idea of women creating a separate political voice for themselves. In his outline for his colony, Coleridge believes they should be granted power, but that power should be tightly controlled by the men of the colony, whose fitness never seems to be questioned in the same way as women's abilities.

Coleridge's writings reflect Britain's transitional colonial empire. He addresses issues such as colonial slavery, a system that Britain would eliminate a year before Coleridge’s death. My paper does not deal exclusively with Coleridge’s writings regarding slavery, but the abolitionist aspect of his writings is an important issue when discussing the economic effects of writing against colonial expansion. Writing against slavery meant writing against an established economic system, and women have a sometimes unrecognized but important role in that changing economy. As women gained a degree of power through the abolitionist discourse, they helped construct an ideology, which placed women at the virtuous center of the domestic realm. I am most concerned with the construction of this ideology, and how it relates to the then rising middle class.

Sussman points out possible reasons for the changing economy in Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. She states that a myth of self-sufficiency existed in England and those who attacked slavery, through a dialogue promoting the abstention from sugar, did so from a “desire for England to disentangle itself from the cross-cultural connections of mercantilism” (84). These attacks on colonial slavery drew upon a domestic ideology. The strategy reinforced the myth of England at the time, a myth of self-sufficiency and unity. In addition, these attackers of slavery wished to portray the mythical domestic home as a world untainted by the effects of colonialism. However, the colonial world did intrude upon the domestic haven in many forms, the most obvious being in the use of sugar. The sugar on the dinner table represented the slave body waiting to be ingested by the family (Sussman 115). Thus, those attacking slavery forced the English consumer to recognize, at least in part, that she or he relied on colonialism in many ways.
Nancy Armstrong postulates that modern domesticity was established as “the only haven from the trials of a heartless economic world” (8). She finds a connection between “the history of British fiction” and “the empowering of the middle classes in England through the dissemination of a new female ideal” (Armstrong 8). Armstrong also states that “written representation of the self allowed the modern individual to become an economic and psychological reality” (8). The virtues embodied by the domestic woman sometimes entered political writings as a tool to help overcome resistance that organized against the rising middle class ideology. Anti-slavery writers incorporated these domestic virtues into their anti-slavery discourse, which, as shown in Sussman’s argument above, involved the idea of an economically self-sufficient England, or at least the myth of one.

With colonialism an important and recurring theme in this paper, I will examine Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, which has been interpreted, at least in part, as a poem about the slave trade. Critics, such as Malcolm Ware, J.R. Ebbatson, and Patrick J. Keane, have pointed out the slave imagery suggested by the poem. My purpose is not to prove that Coleridge’s poem is a slavery poem, although the nature of my analysis must draw upon the slavery evidence to some degree. Certainly, by searching for domestic ideology in the poem, I am sometimes relying on evidence that favors the appeal to feminine virtue that is often found in anti-slavery poetry. In my analysis, I hope to show how Coleridge uses the ideology of the domestic to lend emotional weight to his argument. I have chosen the earliest printed version of the poem, that from the first *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798, to analyze. My study will look at ideas and poetry from early in Coleridge’s career, before he started to rewrite his poems extensively and revise his political ideology.

The central part of my thesis deals with how Coleridge, being the quintessential Romantic poet, allows the domestic ideology to infiltrate his poetry, and how this domesticity affects his works. In particular, how does domesticity affect Coleridge in his resistance to, and support for the colonial sphere? I will take particular note of how the abolitionist rhetorical approach works in his poems and ideology. A prominent force behind the abolitionists’ cause would be an appeal to feminine virtue. Coleridge appeals to feminine virtue, but also attempts to control the nature of this plea, and in doing so, control the construction of the domestic space. A poem such as “The Ancient Mariner” takes place in a realm outside of the ideal domestic household, but even in such a setting, it tries to impose what the domestic sphere should
represent. The Mariner travels from land to land telling his tale, and in doing so he is on the edge of the domestic sphere. Perhaps he could be seen as a Romantic poet helping to pave the way for colonization with his poetry. Even if his poetry professes a warning about the violence of colonialism, it also paves the way for a different kind of conquest by suggesting a subtler form of colonialism, an ideological one. It could be argued that the ideology of the domestic sphere, along with various abolitionist ideologies, helped to justify colonialism because it encouraged negative interpretations of women and race. This paper will focus largely on Coleridge’s interpretation of the domestic space and how that interpretation intersects with the colonial arena.

I wish to take an argument about domestic space suggested by Sussman and extend it to Coleridge.

In *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, Armstrong never takes up the relation between the reorganization of the domestic space around moral influence and emotional authority and changing attitudes toward the colonial arena, but her theories enable such an investigation. Turning her arguments to that use, however, requires an expansion of her idea of the female domestic gaze. This feminine ‘eye of power’ must be understood not merely as a force disciplining the interior of the home, but as an organizing structure that brought the supposedly feminine qualities of compassion and sympathy to bear on the colonial world. (Sussman 123)

As Sussman suggests, the domestic realm extends into the colonial realm. In order for the colonial arena to be influenced by the domestic space, certain assumptions about feminine behavior are made. It assumes that the feminine influence almost always brings peace and order to a household. Thus, those appealing to others for a more sympathetic type of colonialism, especially where slavery is concerned, would refer to the domestic household as an example of the order that should exist in the colonial world. The speaker or writer would tug at the strings that bound the audience to the domestic realm.

If the domestic ideology I have outlined above is a central part of the changing political and economic structures of England during Coleridge’s time, I wish to examine how Coleridge’s writing helps construct this important ideology that centers itself in the domestic realm. I am primarily looking at three of Coleridge’s works:
1. In order to lend itself to an effective appeal, the domestic household must represent the nation. Order at the domestic level ultimately means order at the national level. A home kept in order is a form of patriotism. The nation must be kept in order at one of its smallest levels, the domestic level, if the nation as a whole is to be kept in order. I have chosen to look at “Frost at Midnight.” In this poem, domestic imagery represents something more than the household. Domestic virtue lies at the heart of British civilization. If the domestic lair is well maintained, then the nation will flourish. Coleridge seems to be declaring his own household is in order, and thus, he is patriotic. Of course, there are hints that he hopes for something greater than the established British Empire. In the end, Coleridge is helping to construct the ideology of the domestic realm. However, he does, at times, seem uneasy with the idea of the mother at the center of the household. This contradiction between his construction of a domestic ideology, which empowers women to some extent, and his mistrust of granting women power is a topic I wish to explore throughout this paper.

2. As I mentioned above, “The Rime of The Ancient Mariner” as it has been interpreted by many critics, is a poem about commerce, more specifically, a poem about the slave trade. Those who attempted to regulate or altogether end the slave trade were in part determining what parties should hold the economic power of Britain. Abolitionists’ use of women helped further redefine the place of women domestically, while giving the women political power they previously had not possessed. I wish to explore how Coleridge fit into these movements, which granted women power, but at the same time, confined them. To help contextualize Coleridge’s construction of domesticity and colonial otherness, I will examine Helen Maria Williams’ “On the Bill Which Was Passed in England for Regulating the Slave-Trade”, an anti-slavery poem with more overt examples of domestic virtue.

3. The construction of women’s domestic role relates to these previously mentioned issues of nationalism and economics. It seems that the men who grant women power feel the need to keep that power in check. Women's power must be limited to a specific realm, the household. Coleridge himself put thought into developing a system that, in part, constructs and controls women. I have chosen to look at Coleridge’s theoretical development of a colony as presented in his notebooks and letters. While his “Pantisocracy” scheme never came to be, it offers an interesting insight into how colonial women could, or could not, be controlled from a Romantic perspective.
I. Frost at Midnight

I will begin with a brief dissection of “Frost at Midnight,” a poem which encloses the speaker within the domestic sphere. This poem will help to show where the political and domestic intersected in Coleridge’s life, and how his constructed domestic tranquility affects the outside world. Paul Magnuson, in his essay “The Politics of Frost at Midnight,” outlines the history of the poem and notes that the originally published folio places it beside two highly political poems, “France: An Ode,” and “Fears in Solitude.”

According to Magnuson, “The language of 'Frost at Midnight' in 1798 is the creation of that public discourse, not exclusively the discourse of private circumstances or private meditation. ‘Frost at Midnight’ is a private poem with public meanings because it has a public location” (Magnuson 84). Magnuson also notes that this poem helped Coleridge prove that he was non-seditious through patriotism with a portrait of a tranquil domestic life. Coleridge wanted to prove that he was no longer a radical. At the same time, he reaffirmed his original philosophies, which were not necessarily formed from French ideals (Magnuson 78).

The lair of the domestic “cottage” is a kind of haven from the outside world of politics. “The frost performs its secret ministry,/ Unhelped by any wind.” The domestic and tranquil world that Coleridge has created paves the way for the knowledge that his son will receive. His distance from civilization will allow him to “learn far other lore/And in far other scenes!” (L. 50-51). Coleridge grew in “the great city, pent ‘mid cloisters dim/And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars” (L. 52-53). Coleridge’s growth has been limited, perhaps even tainted, by his close contact with the city. In contrast to this claustrophobic image, Coleridge presents a portrait of a vast open world where his son “shalt wander like a breeze/By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crages/Of ancient mountains” (L. 54-55). His son will become an explorer of sorts, and his exploration of the natural world will allow him to obtain a greater and purer knowledge than Coleridge could have hoped to have for himself. In a sense, his son will become a colonizer of this natural world; a natural world kept in check by harmonious domesticity. One could link Coleridge’s ideas about his son’s education with ideas Coleridge had about Pantisocracy, a topic I will explore in more depth later in the paper. Coleridge planned to establish a colony and remove all temptations for corruption from man. This plan would require the children to be brought up in a society far removed from current civilization. Coleridge envisioned his settlement somewhere in Pennsylvania. He would rewrite civilization and the children would
start with a blank slate. The women of the colony would prove to be more of a problem to the theoretical colony. In "Frost at Midnight", Coleridge’s son explores a world that could be Coleridge’s America, a land pure and uncorrupted by British civilization.

The last six lines, which Coleridge later deleted, show the baby violently freeing himself from his mother’s arms, eager for the world beyond:

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Like those, my babe! Which, ere to-morrow’s warmth
Have capp’d their sharp keen points with pendulous drops,
Will catch thine eye, and with their novelty
Suspend thy little soul; then make thee shout,
And stretch and flutter from thy mother’s arms
As thou would’st fly for very eagerness (L. 75-80)
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In breaking away from the mother’s arms, the son asserts some form of independence, but he does not break away from the domestic world. He will take those domestic ideals with him as he explores and colonizes the natural world. These ideals are the same domestic ideals which, as I will show, guide the Mariner, first through his encounter with the Albatross, then through the guilt the Mariner feels from killing the bird. Perhaps, Coleridge’s removal of his son from maternal arms hints at the fear Coleridge has of the mother, the uneducated or improperly educated mother, corrupting the children of his ideal colony, his ideal natural world. Coleridge realized that society educated many women to have a more limited knowledge of the world. Thus, their lack of knowledge could present a danger if they were left to educate the child on their own. Since Coleridge deleted these lines, he could have felt the overall necessity of keeping the mother in his domestic portrait.

Richard Holmes touches upon Coleridge's education of the child, in particular Coleridge's own son Hartley, present in "Frost at Midnight." Coleridge envisions an educational process that is exempt from the corruption present in the established education that modern civilization embodies. Holmes states:

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the visionary joys of nature, celebrated in ‘This Lime-Tree Bower’ are now developed into a philosophy of emotional education. Coleridge dedicates Hartley as a ‘child of Nature’, who will gain religious awareness through the beauties of the natural world. This of course another version of the Mariner theme, but
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conceived pastorally, as an education without guilt or ‘penance’. The child finds nature already 'hospitable' (Holmes Visions 183).

Thus, the power to learn initially from nature prevents the subject from the need to re-educate him or herself about the natural world, or to unlearn the civilized world. Coleridge desires an education system that takes place outside of established civilization, but not necessarily outside of the domestic realm.

**Lecture on the Slave Trade**

In his "Lecture on the Slave Trade," Coleridge makes arguments that are very much in line with the abolitionist rhetoric of the day. Following a popular argument, Coleridge felt if everyone ceased to consume sugar, the most unnecessary of colonial products, then the slave trade would be unable to support itself and crumble under its own weight. He does not call for abstinence from other colonial products, feeling that sugar will do the trick, and, while abstaining from other products might bring about slavery’s collapse even more quickly, it stands a greater chance of alienating possible supporters of the cause. In other words, colonial products were such a necessity to life, even Coleridge’s life, that only one product could be settled on as a non-necessity.

In his lecture, Coleridge portrays a domestic setting, the dinner table, along with religion, to show that the heart of the domestic lair can easily be penetrated on a daily basis by the products of slavery. However, it may be more convenient for Coleridge and other slave trade opponents to ignore other forms of colonial penetration into the domestic world. Coleridge states that “…in other words, the disuse of Sugar and Rum only would in a certain number of years prove the adequate means of abolition…” ("Lecture" 250). In addition, Coleridge believed it was worse to buy these products because they were more labor intensive ("Lecture" 250). While it may be easier to leave sugar out of one’s tea than to cease purchasing goods made of cotton, it seems that Coleridge’s appeal against sugar usage could result from anxiety over who places the sugar on the dinner table. Ultimately, it is a woman who is in charge of the domestic realm, and Coleridge is in a constant struggle to define this realm.

Coleridge shows contempt for women who will not cease their intake of sugar. Before noting that nine million slaves “have been consumed by the Europeans,” Coleridge states that if “all the people who petitioned for the abolition of this execrable Commerce instead of bustling about and shewing off with all the vanity of pretended Sensibility, simply left off the use of
Sugar and Rum” ("Lecture" 246), then they could do more damage to the slave trade. His critique of vanity is largely directed at women. Coleridge states:

Sensibility indeed we have to spare--what novel-reading Lady does not over flow with it to the great annoyance of her Friends and Family--Her own sorrows like the Princes of Hell in Milton's Pandemonium sit enthroned bulky and vast--while the miseries of our fellow creatures dwindle into pigmy forms, and are crowded, an unnumbered multitude, into some dark corner of the Heart where the eye of sensibility gleams faintly on them at long Intervals-- ("Lecture" 249)

Coleridge argues that feminine sensibility, as a whole, is not effective in eliminating the miseries of those enslaved. As Charlotte Sussman notes, Coleridge never questions the idea of sympathetic identification, but he sees the efforts behind this identification as being often misdirected (125). Coleridge seems to reproach women from the upper middle class. He writes in another publication that: “the fine lady’s nerves are not shattered by the shrieks! She sips a beverage sweetened with human blood, even while she is weeping over the refined sorrows of Werter [sic] or of Clementia. Sensibility is not Benevolence” (Coleridge, Collected Works, 2:139 1). It is interesting to examine Coleridge’s writings on slavery with these ideas in mind. How is Coleridge using his own text to control the political action of the females of Great Britain? To Coleridge, the texts commonly responsible for educating and guiding the female mind were not entirely suitable for creating an individual who could properly take on the institution of slavery. Sussman suggests that the imaginary exploits of a novel’s heroine produces no real results, but a text that, for instance, gives one a sympathetic identification with a West Indian slave would be more effective in spurring one to political action. (125).

In order to make his depiction of slavery more authentic, Coleridge uses evidence gathered from the journal of a slave ship’s doctor. In his paraphrasing and quotations of the doctor, Coleridge appeals to domestic affections, and, as I’m trying to show, the domestic sphere extends itself into the realm of the national. He is using a patriotic appeal, but it is an appeal that has its roots in the affections of family. Coleridge examines the consequences of slavery, not only to the slave and the consumer at home, but also to the sailors on the ship, whom he portrays as themselves unwilling victims of the trade. The unfortunate sailor is forced into the slave trade by debts or some other immediate distress. Often these debts are exaggerated by

1 Quote taken from Charlotte Sussman's Consuming Anxieties, p. 124.
unscrupulous individuals who have no other aim than to lure the sailor into service on a slave ship ("Lecture" 237). Coleridge presents the sailors as a type of slave to bring the negative effects of the slave trade closer to the English home. A form of slavery is a possible fate for the women of England's sons.

Of course, the sailors are in a far worse condition after serving on the ships. To further drive home the point of British sailors becoming victims, Coleridge offers his audience a picture of the fate of many sailors. The slave trade causes not only moral corruption but also physical corruption among those who are caught within it. The trade could ultimately leave the sailor in a state without home or family. Coleridge constructs his depiction of the common sailor with sympathy. A sailor must suffer from the brutality of the Captain and the harshness of the climate. The cruel acts that he is forced to perform have a great effect on him, and this is why the sailor tries to forget those acts by grossly indulging himself while on shore. These indulgences, which lead to the death of many sailors, would probably not be viewed sympathetically by many in Coleridge's audience. However, Coleridge stresses the point that only the brutality of the slave trade, of which the common sailor was forced into, makes the sailor turn to these indulgences as a way to deal with his cruel life ("Lecture" 238).

When Coleridge examines the effects of the suffering slaves, he does so by presenting their world as one parallel to the idea of English domesticity. In order to convey the extent suffering, the poet first constructs a peaceful, domestic world, a world threatened by corruption. He dramatizes the morally and physically debasing effect that slavery has on the domestic tranquility of his idyllic culture.

Such is the infamous and detestable policy of the Europeans.... They inoculate the petty tyrants of Africa with their own vices.... The wretched slaves taken on the field of battle, or snatched from the burning ruins of their villages are led down to the ships—they are examined stark naked male and female, and after being marked on the breast with a red hot iron, with the arms and names of the company or owner, who are they purchasers; they are thrust promiscuously on the ship… ("Lecture" 241)

The burning ruins of villages demonstrate the destruction of domestic tranquility visited upon the various African cultures by European corruption. Undomesticated men, both African and European, destroy the domestic structures of African life. The "petty tyrants of Africa" are
seemingly made worse by the uncompassionate policies of the Europeans. When the captives are forced on a ship, the Europeans brand them, which makes them European property and removes them from control of their own domestic space, the villages. In Coleridge’s “The Ancient Mariner,” there is a reversal of this branding practice. After the Mariner commits his crime against the natural world, that world forces him to wear its symbol, (which is also, as I later argue, a domestic symbol) around his neck. In the Mariner’s case, it is the European male who bears the mark of ownership by another. However, if the natural world has ties to the domestic world, then it is, in a sense, already colonized. At least, the natural world is ideologically colonized by the literature that is representing it.

Throughout his argument, Coleridge is urging the women of Great Britain to take action. The suffering of the people of Africa is real and the pain is inflicted by European vice. Women need to stand up and take control of the domestic realm and domesticate the unruly men who are subjecting their savagery upon the rest of the world. Notice that Africa, a continent usually represented as a dark, savage land, is not portrayed as such by Coleridge. It is only European savagery that infects the continent and breaks apart its seemingly ideal domestic structures. Of course, it must be stressed that Coleridge's tranquil imagery of Africa may not have been constructed entirely for rhetorical effect. As with his colonial "pantisocracy" in America, he had a way of viewing far off lands as an ideal place where nature created a harmonic community. Coleridge saw Africa as an "innocent and happy" world where communal property leads to peace ("Lecture" 240).

Coleridge crafts an argument that presents various points of view of the same theme: the loss of the domestic realm. He has shown British sailors forcibly removed from their homes and country only to be returned in a desolate state. He has shown Europeans burning the domestic structures of Africa. In the passage below, he reverts to a common rhetorical strategy among abolitionist, the separation of mother and child:

When the vessel arrives at its destined port, they are again exposed to sale & examined with an unfeeling indecency that may not be described—picked out at the pleasure of the purchaser—the wife is separated from her husband—the mother from her child and if they linger with each other at this moment of separation the lash is again applied. ("Lecture" 242)
Notice that the passage stresses identification with a female point of view: the wife loses her husband, the mother is forced to abandon her child. It seems that more and more throughout the lecture that Coleridge is attempting to control how women perceive their actions. Thinking about benevolence is one thing, but taking action to ensure benevolence is another.

Once again, the following passage seems to be directed at the domestic realm, and to a significant degree, women:

Would you choose that others should do this unto you? And if you shudder with selfish Horror at the very thought do you yet dare to be the occasion of it to others! If one tenth part only of you [who] profess yourselves Christians, were to leave off not all the West India Commodities but only Sugar and Rum—the one useless and the latter pernicious all this Misery might be avoided—Gracious Heaven! At your meals you rise up and pressing your hands to your bosom ye lift up your eyes to God and Say O lord bless the Food which thou has given us! A part of that Food among most of you is sweetened with the Blood of the Murdered. (Lecture 248)

In his attack, Coleridge brings the focus back to the dinner table, a table of which the woman has control. It is she that has sweetened the food with the fruits of slavery. The blame largely rests on her shoulders. The dinner table, and thus the domestic realm, needs to be controlled more effectively if slavery and other atrocities of colonialism are to be abolished. Coleridge portrays sensibility, especially feminine sensibility as an affectation rather than a serious way of thinking about any real problem. However, feminine sensibility is not confined to Coleridge's negative remarks. Writers such as Helen Maria Williams, with whom Coleridge was familiar, would show that the boundaries of traditional feminine sensibility could be transcended. In looking at feminine sensibility, I wish to analyze how the ideas of traditional sensibility interact with ideas of the domestic space of which women were assumed to be in charge.

II. The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Helen Maria Williams

In discussing “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” I wish to expand my exploration into how the colonial world intersects with the domestic realm, and how the idea of the domestic realm influenced the economic conditions of England. How does Coleridge portray sympathetic identification, and how does his poem’s construction vary from that of other anti-slavery poems of the time? “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” is, at least in part, an anti-slavery/colonial
poem. While Coleridge's anti-slavery ideas are not hard to pinpoint, especially when compared to his "Lecture on the Slave Trade," they are bundled into a supernatural romantic vision. I intend to examine how his mythology of the seafaring mariner differs from other mythologies developed by abolitionists; in particular, I will analyze Helen Maria Williams’ “On the Bill Which Was Passed in England for Regulating the Slave-Trade.”

I shall break my analysis into three parts. First, I will present a brief examination of the slavery themes in “Ancient Mariner.” Then, I shall look at slavery themes in Williams’s poem and how they intersect with Coleridge’s ideas. Finally, I shall look at the differences and think about why Coleridge has appropriated a common appeal against slavery in the form of the Mariner. His Romantic narrative creates a space where domestic appeals against colonialism can exist. Ultimately, analyzing the slavery issues in "The Ancient Mariner" reveals the representation of domesticity constructed by Coleridge's work.

The Crimes of the Ancient Mariner

As I mentioned earlier, I am not setting out to prove the “The Ancient Mariner” a poem about slavery. Other critics have (more or less) successfully made the case for slavery in the poem, so I do not intend to add any more criticism to the slavery debate. Rather, I’m going to focus on the areas that will further illustrate how Coleridge constructs a domestic realm that has obvious links to the colonial world. The way colonizing activities depreciates domestic ideals is important to the central theme in “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.” However, Coleridge shows that domestic ideals could help reform the colonial activities of England. I will also look at the depreciation of domestic ideals in Williams’s poem, and to a lesser degree Robert Southey’s “The Sailor, Who Had Served in the Slave Trade.” In the end, it is about finding a way to balance domestic ideals with colonialism. For the idea is not to eliminate colonialism entirely, they realize it is a necessity to the British economy, but rather make it more palatable to those holding domestic ideals. Eliminating slavery is one of the ways to do so.

First, it is necessary to determine the nature of the albatross. Certainly, it represents a part of the natural, and supernatural, world, and when the Mariner kills the albatross, he is committing a crime against the natural world. J.R. Ebbatson equates this crime against the natural world to the killing of natives through colonialism (177). I would also like to suggest that the albatross represents the domestic realm, a realm that exists at the edges of Coleridge's world but still exerts a powerful influence. In Coleridge’s poem, the domestic realm becomes
part of the natural world, and this realm takes control of the Mariner’s ship after he violates the natural laws of the world. Just as the albatross initially guides the ship, the natural world, calling upon the world's supernatural aspects, attempts to guide the Mariner back from an undomesticated path of violence. To put it simply, the albatross helps domesticate the savage Mariner. And while he does not have a family or home by the end of the poem, he has been reformed. His days of killing albatross are over. Richard Holmes notes that the use of bird images had a particular importance to Coleridge, and the tenderness of mother birds appealed to him (Holmes, *Early Visions* 80). The albatross seems to watch over the ship with a maternal instinct:

> And a good south wind sprung up behind,  
> The Albatross did follow;  
> And every day for food or play  
> Came to the Marinere’s hollo! (L. 69-72)

The bird acts as a guide, and after its demise, the ship becomes hopelessly lost. As the ship is further removed from its home shores, it becomes further removed from any kind of domesticating influence. The killing of the albatross only severs the final link. Of course, Coleridge continues to represent the household in other forms throughout the length of his poem. Sometimes he represents the domestic lair as the antithetical forms of Death and Death's mate, and at other times, Coleridge represents it through the Mariner himself. The domestic realm goes through a multitude of transformations, and even though this realm is physically absent, it still represents a powerful guiding force in the poem.

To further explore the idea of Coleridge's representation of the domestic space, I wish to look at his construction of a colonial other through the use of vampire imagery. The colonial other in romantic literature has sometimes been represented by the image of the vampire. Shadows of race and racism show themselves through Coleridge's colonialist ideals. As in his pantisocracy scheme, Coleridge wants his white European to inhabit the untamed natural world, displacing the natives. The transplant of indigenous populations would occur in a less violent way, of course, as the moral of “The Ancient Mariner” is to love god’s creatures, even if in a condescending manner.

In Coleridge’s poem, a vampire appears, and she represents an exotic other whose blood has been mingled with the blood of the white European. At one point, the Mariner himself
succumbs to the tendencies of the vampire; he becomes a cannibalistic vampire, sucking his own blood. “I bit my arm and suck’d the blood” (152). After his transformation, he regains the power of speech, but the power of speech for the Mariner becomes a manifestation of his newfound powers. He reserves the power to recount his tale, and his speech infects those who hear his tale. He preys upon others with his vampire powers, paving the way for future colonialism, a colonialism that he revises into a more domesticated state. By a more domesticated state of colonialism, I mean that while slavery was unpalatable to abolitionists such as Coleridge, he recognizes that colonialism is in fact essential to the British Empire and cannot be eliminated by any means, nor does Coleridge seem to want to eliminate it entirely. Coleridge must find a way to make the means of colonialism compatible with domestic idealism. Instead of criticizing colonialism as a whole, the Mariner is criticizing colonialism that does not adhere to following the path of the albatross, which represents domesticity as well as nature. I will further study Coleridge’s idealistic view of colonialism when I discuss his plan to set up a small colony in North America.

In a poem that stresses the importance of domestic tranquility, women are for the most part absent from "The Ancient Mariner. When the Mariner and his crew encounter a woman, Death’s companion, she seems to be a vampire, of the more traditional type.

Her lips are red, her looks are free
Her locks are yellow as gold:
Her skin as white as leprosy,
And she is far liker Death than he;
Her flesh makes still air cold (186-190)

The vampiric imagery represents an exotic allure, which is balanced out by the deadly game she is playing with the crew’s lives. The representation of the only female in “The Ancient Mariner” is problematic. It brings to mind McKusick’s discussion of the place of females in Coleridge’s pantisocracy plan. Coleridge could not quite figure out the place of the female body in relation to his colony. McKusick states that, on one hand, they were driven to “extremes of exotic fantasy,” and on the other, “patriarchal terror” (122). The female body, while quite inviting, could possibly bring about the downfall of their male-centered society. The same case is true in “The Ancient Mariner,” with the male-centered society being, of course, the ship.
In Coleridge's description of the allegorical figure "Death," it physically embodies the corruption of his undomesticated female mate. Death also represents the rotting vessel, or a rotting society, and as Coleridge notes in his lecture, a slave ship rots more rapidly than a non-slave ship (Lecture 241). Coleridge's portrayal of Death more resembles the accelerated rate of decomposition of a slave vessel than the decay of a human body:

His bones were black with many a crack
All black and bare, I ween,
Jet-black and bare, save where with rust
Of mouldy damps and charnal crust
They’re patch’d with purple and green (L. 181-185)

Death is obviously lifeless, whereas his “spouse” has red lips that suggest otherwise. However, she, somewhat contradictorily, is “far liker Death than he” (L. 189). Her consort with Death produces a body far more shocking and even less likely to exist in reality than Death itself. Her red lips suggest she has been drinking blood. Could she represent the female consumer who does not abstain from putting sugar in her tea? Upon consuming the blood of others, she becomes tainted. Perhaps, to draw out an argument of eighteenth-century abolitionists, drinking the blood of slaves has racially tainted her. An argument that includes the idea of racial purity is racist by today's standards, but it must be remembered that abolitionists of this period did not necessarily consider slaves equal to themselves, even though they did not feel Africans should be imprisoned and forced to work. Death's mate has mixed blood, and thus, she represents the mixed offspring of the collective European slaveholder. In a sense, the European becomes the slave. Charlotte Sussman states that “the abolitionist accusation of English cannibalism enacts a kind of paranoid reversal of [the] fantasy [of being eaten by cannibalistic savages]; as a result of their improper consumption of colonial products, British consumers are themselves transformed into the savage cannibals they had once fantasized as existing only on the colonial periphery” (116).

As Coleridge argued in his "Lecture on the Slave Trade," the sometimes unwilling crew of the slave vessel is also the victim of the trade. Their own bodies suffer as they inflict suffering on the slave body. The sailors drop dead after their encounter with Death and his consort, but that end is only the beginning of the abuse to their bodies. The crew becomes lifeless zombies that represent carriers of a disease, a physical manifestation of colonial
transgressions. The threat of disease is evident when the wedding guest shows fear of the Ancient Mariner. He fears the "skinny hand" of the Mariner and notes that the Mariner is "long and lank and brown" (l. 216-218). The guest's fear could stem from the fact he recognizes signs of a specific disease. As Sussman notes, the English feared intrusion from the colonial world into their domestic sphere (83). The threat of contamination may be physically present in the Mariner in the form of yellow fever. Debbie Lee points out the actual fears of yellow fever present at the time in England and that the Mariner’s appearance could suggest one who has the sickness (53). In Coleridge's time, the disease, linked with expansion into the tropics, could have been seen as a kind of punishment for colonialism (Lee 48-49). In a sense, the Mariner’s body has been transformed into the body of a slave. Thus, the contamination the guest truly fears is one of racial origins and this contamination most likely would arrive in England from a sailor who has sailed to the colonies.

To further explore the fear of the contamination of the European body by a colonial slave, we must further look at the crew of the Mariner’s ship. When the dead crew members are resurrected, they become slave-like, zombie creatures forced to spend the rest of their existence as the crew of the vessel. Here, the unwilling crew mixes with the slave cargo. As the crew and slaves become one body, moral corruption physically manifests itself in their decaying, but still somewhat alive bodies.

As the mariner’s ship approaches the end of its journey, the corpses of the crew go through another kind of transformation. A seraph hovers over every body, representing a kind of final redemption for the crew. However, Coleridge presents a sharp contrast to the physical state of the crew, as they are a blackened, lifeless bunch who obtain representation from a group of spirits projecting a “lovely light”:

This seraph-band, each wav’d his hand:
It was a heavenly sight:
They stood as signals to the land,
Each one a lovely light (515-522)

As I noted earlier, the ship was originally under the guidance of a maternal influence, as suggested by the albatross. The ship's guiding spirits are the same maternal influence. This maternal influence brings order to the somewhat chaotic journey, a journey that leaves the males in charge without guidance. The seraph guides represent a domestic order translated into the
natural and supernatural worlds. These spirits are a link between the Mariner and his native land. Coleridge rewrites the rules of the colonial world, but at the same time re-affirms them, by his representation of the natural world, just as he re-affirms them in “Frost at Midnight.” The domestic realm therefore represents the ideal basis for the nation. In Coleridge's poem, the same language that describes domesticity also describes nationhood. Coleridge's political manipulation of the domestic ideal does not necessarily help end slavery but attempts to influence its mechanism, which is, above all else, an economic one. The domestic representation contains a powerful ideology, which could help promote great political change. Coleridge critiques colonialism, but he does not try advocate destroying the system; he merely advocates changing it by resorting to domestic appeals. At the same time, there is a suggestion of some kind of imagined racial purity in these “heavenly” seraphs. Coleridge's idea of the English domestic sphere seems to repudiate the mixing of races, which ultimately results from colonialism. While the idea of domestic purity is disturbing, it must have been obvious to most writers at the time that their idea of purity could never be realized when colonialism, whether checked or unchecked by domestic virtue, is part of the equation.

While the seraphs present a kind of domestic redemption, the Mariner’s corruption cannot be easily erased. The redemptive, guiding lights are fleeting; they alone cannot completely absolve the Mariner of his guilt:

Then vanish’d all the lovely lights;  
The bodies rose anew:  
With silent pace, each to his place,  
Came back the ghastly crew.  
The wind, that shade nor motion made,  
On me alone it blew. (L. 531-536)

The Mariner can only find redemption when he returns to the society where the domestic appeal is strongest. Since language is limited on the Mariner’s ship, he must look elsewhere to ask for forgiveness. The crew is voiceless even when represented by the seraphs: “No voice did they impart— / No voice; but O! the silence sank, / Like music on my heart” (524-526). Even the Mariner is speechless unless he takes drastic measures such as sucking his own blood, which transforms him into a vampire, far from the ideal domestic male. As his ship goes down, the Mariner notes that he “ne spake ne stirr’d!” (576). Ironically, the Mariner, the narrator of his
story, has no voice inside the tale itself. The power of speech often eludes him. He lacks the power precisely because he lacks an audience that exists within the domestic realm.

The Mariner’s first contact with civilization forces a hysterical reaction from the boy who arrives to help rescue the mariner. The stanza shows the English fear of contamination that is present when a colonialist, who has been outside the domesticated world, returns to the shores of England. The boy succumbs to a temporary insanity:

I took the oars: the pilot’s boy,
Who now doth crazy go,
Laugh’d loud and long, and all the while
His eyes went to and fro,

“Ha! Ha!” quoth he—“full plain I see,
“The devil knows how to row.” (597-602)

Supernatural forces will not allow the boat to come into contact with the shore. The ship sinks before it can be boarded or before any of the ghastly crew, with the exception of the Mariner, who is trying to find a domesticated language of remorse to help him re-enter society, manage to escape.

The crew of the small boat expects to find a lifeless body when they rescue the Mariner. When he shows signs of life, or more precisely, speech, the rescuers over-react. “I mov’d my lips: the pilot shriek’d” (L. 593). There is a possibility that the rescued man will relate horrors that could upset their precisely balanced world. The Mariner, however, will eventually reconstruct his tale in a language that can be presented to polite society, but he must first find a hermit to help him translate. Upon the Mariner's return to shore, he decides to find the hermit to whom he can relate his tale to wash away the Albatross’s blood. In other words, the hermit will help re-integrate the man who committed the anti-domestic act of killing the albatross back into society. The Mariner's re-integration does not end with the hermit, though. He then proceeds to walk from land to land relating his tale, one that must be shared with the civilized world. His tale is one that stresses the importance of the domestic realm. At the beginning of Coleridge's poem, the Mariner urgently speaks to the Wedding Guest. The Mariner must find someone who can understand the language of the domestic appeal, and a guest at a marriage ceremony, a witness to beginnings of a new domesticity, seems like a good choice:

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
The moment that his face I see
I know the man that must hear me;
To him my tale I teach.  (619-623)

However, telling the tale becomes a substitute for any real action the Mariner may wish to take. After all, the Mariner has not set up the equivalent of a bird sanctuary on his return to civilization. Perhaps, Coleridge is trying to stress the importance of literature as a tool for influencing the action of men and women, while at the same time taking note of its limits. Ultimately, he feels some form of action against slavery will be necessary, such as abstinence from colonial products, to make a lasting change in society. Domestic appeals can only go so far.

On the Bill Which Was Passed in England for Regulating the Slave-Trade

In examining Helen Maria Williams’s “On the Bill,” a poem with anti-slavery sentiment similar to Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner," I want to look at how her appeal against the slave trade makes use of the domestic realm, and what difference exist between each poet's approach. Both poems share the theme of redemption. For Williams, it is the redemption of England, which had recently passed a bill regulating the slave trade. In Coleridge's poem, it is redemption of the Mariner, who represents a British sailor complicit in the crimes of the slave trade. It is interesting to compare Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner" and Williams’s "On the Bill," since she seems to have had some influence on Coleridge and Wordsworth (Jones 137).

Williams presents a more direct account of the slave trade than Coleridge's cryptic "The Ancient Mariner." Like Coleridge’s poem, Williams portrays a slave ship, a “dark vessel, which contains/the wretch new bound in hopeless chains!” (5-6). Certainly, there is nothing cryptic about this image, but it does bring to mind the Mariner, a sailor, most likely on a slave vessel, who becomes a slave himself, bound to the symbolic form of the Albatross tied around his neck. Williams’ poem does not occur in a mythical realm far removed from any real coastline, as she specifically mentions Africa in the line: “As Afric’s less’ning shore recedes—”(8). The poem optimistically projects itself forward to a time where the horrors of the slave trade will not exist and points an accusatory finger at the colonial powers which propagate slavery:

Man! who to Afric’s shore has past,
Relentless, as the annual blast
That sweeps the Western Isles, and flings
Destruction from its furious wings!  (17-20)

As in Coleridge's poem, where the Mariner kills an albatross, which represents, at least in part, the violence enacted upon natives by colonial powers, the colonial powers in Williams's poem bring death and destruction to Africa. Williams's representation of death does not have any of Coleridge's supernatural flair. While “the fierce spectre of Despair” (96) hangs over the ship in Williams’s poem, the crew of the ship do not meet an allegorical representation of Death. Even though the poem is optimistic about the end of the slave trade, the image of death persists throughout much of this poem. While Death has been shown to have the capability to "seize the pent victim’s sinking breath" (14), the poem optimistically suggests that the painful deaths of slaves will soon be a thing of the past. England's regulation of the slave trade will ease and finally put an end to the suffering of the slaves in a manner that does not involve death.

While Coleridge only represents the slave allegorically in the “The Ancient Mariner,” the suffering slave has a physical presence in Williams's poem. Williams portrays slaves shackled within the lower decks of the ship. Many passages, while neither graphic nor gratuitous, show the suffering slave. In Coleridge's work, the tortured body only exists in the periphery until the Mariner kills the albatross, which represents the brutality of Europe to the people of other continents, like Africa. The Mariner's actions bring about a punishment to the Mariner and his crew. His crew is killed and the Mariner is forced to deal with the physical manifestation of his guilt. He is tortured in a unique way, but it represents the torturing of the slave body. In fact, the Mariner becomes a slave to the forces of nature that punish him. Even death does not free the Mariner's crew, as they still have a role to play.

In the end though, redemption comes to the Mariner, just as it comes to England in Williams's poem. Both poets appeal to the reader in part by showing the contrast between the state of a slave ship and the ideal domestic realm.

**Domestic Appeal**

The horrors of the Trans-Atlantic journey, or the Middle Passage are often depicted in Abolitionist poetry. Williams represents slavery by one of its most shocking features, families being torn apart. Debbie Lee states: “Yet, among the larger poetic community, the broken ties of brothers, fathers, and sons were not nearly as graphic nor as emotionally powerful, as the painful splintering of mother and their children, especially slave mothers and children” (196). The
imagery of the mother being separated from or killing her child during the journey is seemingly obligatory for this type of poetry. Williams’s poem contains images where death separates a mother and her child:

No more, in desperation wild,
Shall madly strain her gasping child” (21,25-26).
With all the mother at her soul,
With eyes where tears have ceas'd to roll,
Shall catch the livid infant's breath,
Then sink in agonizing death! (25 -30)

The image suggests that the mother is killing her child, and perhaps dying herself from the sorrow and pain. The death of the mother and the child destroys the family. This disrupts the idea of domestic order, which is at the heart of poems such as Williams's. Using images of slave women killing their children was a double-edged sword. While the images could be used to illustrate the brutality inflicted upon the slave women that would force them to kill their children, the images could also be used by pro-slavery writers to show the maliciousness of female slaves. Lee notes that both pro-slavery and anti-slavery writings used images of slave women and children (196). Pro-slavery documents placed the blame on the mothers. It could be said that the white plantation owners were trying to emphasize how little importance slave women had for their own children and families. Pro-slavery rhetoric seemed to focus on a negative depiction of the desperate actions of the slave, while ignoring the brutal conditions that led to those actions. Thus, mothers who sometimes killed their children, either in the womb or soon after birth, to save them from the fate of slavery, and to deprive the slave owner of another worker, were the ones in the wrong.

It is not only the representation of slave women that gives Williams's poem domestic ties. Williams gives England a parental, protecting image:

Britain! The noble, blest decree
That soothes despair, is fram’d by thee!
Thy powerful arm has interpos’d,
And one dire scene for ever clos’d(31-34).

England can soothe the suffering of the slaves more than the slave mother, for the slave mother can only ease her infant’s pain by killing the child. The idea of England being the protector of
slaves is part of the cultural centric message behind the poem. The imagined domesticity of the slave mothers also happens to be an English idea of domesticity. In the above passage, Britain's interposing arm seems to have a fatherly, almost godlike quality to it. Thus, there seems to be a need for a fatherly protecting figure overlooking the domestic realm to rescue it when the mother's actions have failed.

English women are meant to identify with the suffering slave women “of mind too feeble to sustain/ The vast, accumulated pain” (23-24). We picture mothers torn away from their homes, but we are not given a clear idea what an African home or family is like. The poem is striving to portray a universal motherhood, such as Lee states Wordsworth is attempting in "the Mad Mother" (198). Nothing specific to African culture presents itself in Williams's poem. The suffering the African mothers endure may be authentic enough, but any hint of their culture and their true identity is erased. The main idea is that English sympathy will save these slave mothers, as they have no power or agency of their own. However, Lee notes that some slave women took control over their own reproduction, their bodies and in turn the plantations themselves (197). Collectively, they could determine how many new workers would be born to that plantation. The economic future of the plantation was in a large part controlled by the capability and willingness of the slave mother to reproduce. It may not only have been desperation that forces the grieving mother to kill her child, but it may also have been a form of rebellion. In reality, English women could not readily identify with the actions of slave women. English women did not truly understand slave women, so the slave women had to be transformed into whimpering creatures for whom the English could feel sympathy.

Williams draws a sharp contrast between the reader's condition and the terrible condition of the slave. She imagines the reader in a state of domestic bliss:

For you, while morn in graces gay
Wakes the fresh bloom of op'ning day,
Gilds with her purple light your dome,
Renewing all the joys of home,-- (129-132)

The above passage shows the dawn bringing another day of domestic joy for the reader. When Williams portrays the condition of the slave, it produces the opposite effect:

Ah, think how desolate his state,
How cheerful light must hate,
Whom, sever’d from his native soil,
The morning wakes to fruitless toil
To labours hope shall never cheer,
Or fond domestic joy endear! (143-148)

The slave does not wake up to a joyful home. He wakes up far from his home and domestic bliss. However, the domestic happiness that the slave shall feel no more is again mostly an English way of life. The poem, in a subtle way, is justifying colonialism by overwriting the culture of the slave. A cultural colonialism is taking place in this poem as one culture is replaced with English domesticity. Williams also endorses colonialism by showing Britain redeem itself through benevolence acts which are formed at a domestic level. In Williams's poem it is Europe, that is guilty of bringing unhappiness to Africa.

And dare presumptuous, guilty man,
Load with offence his fleeting span?
Deform creation with the gloom
Of crimes that blot its cheerful bloom? (75-78)

England is implicit in this crime, but it realizes its mistakes and tries to rectify them. It is England, "first of EUROPE'S polish'd lands/To ease the captive's iron bands" (37-38). England is the dominant global power, and while it once spread pain, it is now redeeming itself by spreading compassion. The naval powers of England no longer shall be a part of the slave trade. Williams illustrates the spreading of peace with the expansion of the British Empire:

The gen'rous sailor, he who dares
All forms of danger, while he bears
The British flag o'er sultry seas,
And spreads it on the Polar breeze;
He to whose guardian arm we owe
Each blessing that the happy know; (177-182)

Williams is rapidly erasing the slave trade from English history. The sailors are now bringing blessings instead of pain. There are religious overtones to this passage, which reflect the actions of Coleridge's Mariner when he gains the ability to bless the creatures of the sea.

If we briefly turn our attention back to Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner,” we can see that the domestic sphere, while still maintaining some kind of influence through supernatural
elements, is always kept out of sight. In some cases it is just off stage, as in the case of the wedding. The Mariner represents a man who has journeyed outside the influence of the domestic sphere, and this leads him down a path of despair. The despair is ultimately the result of the violence committed during the journey. The killing of the albatross would not have occurred if the Mariner had felt a domestic influence. The albatross's death represents a destruction of innocence and a final severing of domestic ties, as the killing of the infant does in Williams's poem.

Williams's poem is optimistic as it imagines a time when Britain's actions will erase the suffering of slavery. In the end, her poem brings redemption to Britain, which has benefited greatly from the slave trade. While she wrote this poem in response to a bill passed in 1788 in England regulating the number of slaves allowed on a ship, it would not be until 1808 that the British slave trade would be abolished. It would take until the 1834 for slavery to be abolished completely in British colonies. Given the state slavery was in at the time of the poem's composition, "On the Bill" is not very critical of Britain's actions. Certainly it is less so than Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner."

In part her poem's argument relies on the reader's ability to recognize the need for domestic attachments and it also asks the reader to identify with Africans who have had their domestic ties severed. The poem strives for a universal sympathy, and in doing so it partially erases the culture of the portrayed Africans. That is not to say that the method does not effectively attempt to portray suffering. Williams herself saw a need to portray suffering in a more realistic manner than the heroines of novels would go through. The pain and suffering of the slaves was the reality, and it needed to be presented as such. Ten years after writing the poem, Williams wrote that “the tear of sensibility which has so often been shed over this spot for the woes of fiction, may now fall for sorrows that have the dull reality of existence" (Williams, A Tour of Switzerland, 180). It must be noted that she wrote these thoughts after the French revolution, and she viewed the world with more maturity. Chris Jones states that Williams "Follows a trajectory common to many radical writers, from a relatively unthinking trust in the progressive reformation of society to a recognition that such hopes cannot rely merely on collective humanitarian feelings" (159). Williams's optimism faded somewhat over the years, but as Jones states, experiences such as the French Revolution helped her step outside the bounds

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2 Quote taken from Chris Jones's Radical Sensibility, p.156.
of traditional feminine sensibility in part by recognizing there is such a thing as necessary evil (145). She was often criticized for stepping outside the bounds of traditional feminine sensibility. She became a supporter of the French Revolution because, among other things, it came with a promise of the end of the slave trade in France (Jones 138). The necessary evil would be the violent insurrections that arose in France in the name of freedom. She accepted and defended this violence to a large degree (Jones 145). In the end, Williams sensed that action, even if the means were unsavory, needed to be taken. A work of the imagination alone could not bring about change.

Williams's sensibility provides a contrast to Coleridge's idea of feminine sensibility. Certainly, his image of a woman crying over imaginary sorrows while taking no action to prevent real sorrows does not describe Williams. While her poem, "On the Bill Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade," may have appealed to traditional forms of sensibility and may have imagined a more peaceful and passive solution to slavery, her later writings accept that, at times, violent action is necessary to bring about beneficial change.

Aesthetics and Anti-Slavery Writing

To help understand Coleridge’s creative decisions when rewriting the domestic space, I briefly wish to examine Wordsworth. In a discussion of Wordsworth’s “The Mad Mother,” another poem that relies on a form of the domestic appeal, Lee states that “What Wordsworth did not want was to drag readers through stereotypical experiences, ones that had been replayed in ideological poetry, where readers would recognize mere fixed categories of otherness and would thus process his poems without feeling sympathy with something beyond themselves” (198). As I mentioned earlier, Sussman has noted that Coleridge never questioned the idea of sympathetic identification, only that the sympathies may be misdirected (125). Coleridge has represented the middle passage in a slightly different fashion than other anti-slavery poems, such as Southey’s and Williams’s. His poem lacks the image of a mother killing her child, and it does not represent African slaves during a Trans-Atlantic voyage. Thus, there is no slave body to violate. Despite the absence of the slave body, Coleridge's poem still contains a domestic appeal. He uses arguments similar to those found in his "Lecture," but they are now more aesthetically controlled. While his poem does not contain suffering African slaves, he represents pain through the images of the crew. In a way, they represent not only sailors but also the slave body. The sailors have been ripped away from their families by Death, which can be viewed as a
manifestation of a colonial power in this instance. Death makes slaves out of the crew. The Mariner himself enacts the violence of colonialism when he kills the Albatross. His action could represent anything from the many Trans-Atlantic violations of the slave body, such as a rape and murder, to the abduction of slaves from their native land. In a sense, by taking the Albatross out of the sky, the Mariner takes the figurative African from his or her home shore. In a discussion of Wordsworth’s slavery poetry, Lee makes note of the shifting representations of the slave body in “The Ancient Mariner”: “Like Coleridge’s ‘Rime of the Ancient Mariner’, Wordsworth’s poems became more powerful because they made old tropes mysterious and new, because they turned stereotypes into disturbingly unfixed figures” (Lee 202).

The Mariner’s voyage lacks a feminine, domesticated influence and thus, becomes ripe for corruption. The “slimy things” that “did crawl with legs / Upon the slimy sea” show how the Mariner originally views the natural world, which would include the natives of Africa. Keeping the ideas of shifting representation in mind, these "things" could also portray the Mariner's disgust for the corruption within himself and any other colonialists, such as his crew (L. 119-122). At times, The Mariner embodies the corrupt patriarchal aspects of the ship’s family. He performs the only moment of action in the poem when he kills the bird. After bad fortune strikes, he expresses his love for the crew, yet still feels disgust for the natural world:

The many men so beautiful,
And they all dead did lie!
And a million million slimy things
Liv’d on-and so did I. (228-231)

It is quite probable that he is the captain of the vessel, since he is the one held responsible for the crimes against nature. I mentioned above that his wild stare is a sort of antithesis to the feminine gaze. It is this gaze which supposedly exerts a positive influence over society. However, the Mariner may at some points in the poem possess a maternal instinct. The domestic influence is a passive one, and when the Mariner blesses the sea creatures that had disgusted him, he is doing so “unaware” (l. 279):

A spring of love gusht from my heart,
And I bless’d them unaware!
Sure my kind Saint took pity on me,
And I bless’d them unaware. (275-279)
He spreads maternal love among the life of the open sea. He no longer wishes to kill, but brings a positive influence, by taking no action other than being there.

Again, the domestic realm exists largely on the outskirts of this poem. While the reader does not encounter the domestic space directly, its presence is felt. Coleridge keeps the domestic influence on the outside of the poem, yet, even on the outside, it is a powerful influence. Coleridge almost seems afraid of the power represented by the domestic realm, of which women are often in control and keeps it at a distance from his male dominated colonial sphere. As previously mentioned, the Mariner casts a domestic influence onto the sea; the domestic power has been abdicated to the male. When Coleridge portrays a woman in "The Ancient Mariner," she is depicted as a decaying, morally corrupt body. Death's mate is first seen gambling onboard Death’s ship. It is true that the Bride is briefly glimpsed at one point in the poem and it could be seen as a positive portrayal: “The Bride hath pac’d into the Hall, / Red as a rose is she” (37-38). However, if we recall Death’s mate, whose “lips are red…looks are free…skin is as white as leprosy”(386-388), the description of the bride seems inadequate; it is cut short before we get a true sense of the Bride’s character. Why is Coleridge afraid to present a full picture of the bride? Also, why is a female body portrayed as the antithesis to domesticity? I will further analyze Coleridge’s attempts to locate the female body in my discussion of his Pantisocracy plan.

Robert Southey’s “The Sailor, Who Had Served in the Slave Trade” is often read as a companion piece to “The Ancient Mariner” (Richardson 145). Southey's poem helps illustrate more elusive political meanings in Coleridge’s poem. When both poems are placed side by side, the similarities are quite apparent. The similarities between these two poems are more obvious than those between "The Ancient Mariner" and Williams’s "On the Bill." The basic plot of Southey's poem, that a sailor has committed a crime, and is repentant for that crime, sounds remarkably like "The Ancient Mariner." Like the Mariner, the sailor of "The Sailor" has “done a cursed thing…/It haunts me night and day” (29-30). Unlike Coleridge, Southey keeps his appalling crimes based in reality; none of the supernatural elements that surround the murder of the Albatross are present. Whereas the Mariner kills the Albatross, which thereupon curiously brings ill fortune to him and his crew, the sailor has committed one of the numerous violations of a slave body. The sailor serves onboard a slave vessel:

One woman, sulkier than the rest,
Would still refuse her food, . . .
O Jesus God! I hear her cries!
I see her in her blood!
The captain made me tie her up,
And flog while he stood by;
And then he cursed me if I staid
My hand to hear her cry.  

Southey's sailor goes down a violent path and abuses his slave. However, unlike Coleridge's Mariner, he does not do so by his own choice. The captain of the vessel forces the crew to beat the slaves. Also, Southey's sailor seems conscious of the wrong he inflicts upon the slaves as he is torturing them, unlike Coleridge's Mariner, who only seems aware of the senseless violence he inflicts upon the albatross after his ship goes astray.

While there is no direct representation of the domestic sphere in Southey's poem, he refers to the affection presumed to be present in the domestic realm:

What woman's child a sight like that
Could bear to look upon!
And still the Captain would not spare..
But made me still flog on. 

Although it does not make a direct reference to the domestic realm, we are given the impression through this passage that the domestic realm still held some influence over the sailor. The sailor is as good as homeless. He can find no peace on the ship he serves on, and it seems the only place he can find peace is within the church. Any home the sailor once had is now out of reach. All he has now is his ship, where most, if not all, domestic ties seem to have been severed when he lost his innocence aboard the slave ship. His condition mirrors the homeless state of sailors that Coleridge refers to in his "Lecture on the Slave Trade." He lives in a state of "wretchedness (l. 8)."

Southey's poem makes the crimes of the sailor obvious, whereas Coleridge shrouds his Mariner’s actions in mystery. Coleridge's poem can stand on its own, outside of any political context, and reading the poem without a political context gives it a more timeless quality. However, when reading the poem Alan Richardson suggests that we should not read Coleridge’s ballad only as a slavery poem. It is of course, much more than that. We should keep the
political elements, such as slavery, in mind, and we will be able to read the text in a more
“historically engaged manner” (Richardson 145-146).

III. Pantisocracy

In his university days, Coleridge, along with Robert Southey and several others,
concocted the Pantisocracy scheme, originally known as Pantocracy, or rule by all. To put it
quite simply, his idea was to create an idyllic colony somewhere in America. They eventually
decided on Pennsylvania as a suitable location.

In his biography on Coleridge, Robert Holmes mentions the hypnotic effect Coleridge
had on others and how this power helped him recruit more people for the his colony plan (71). It
brings to mind the Mariner who hypnotizes the Wedding guest. As I suggested earlier, the
Mariner’s tale helps pave imagines a form of colonialism in which he will journey from land to
land reciting his Romantic ballad. The Mariner helps to colonize others with his poetry.

Richard Holmes notes that the philosophical assumptions Coleridge formed for the
Pantisocracy idea were to become a central part of his poetry. “Far from being an aberration,
or—as is often suggested a temporary fit of youthful idealism, they form the intellectual basis of
many of the speculative questions which Coleridge carried into his major poetry and later critical
prose” (Holmes 82). The youthful, idealistic plan that Coleridge and Southey were trying to
arrive at involved an idea that man is not inherently evil, and if given the proper conditions,
human nature will become more peaceful and virtuous (Holmes 74). The pantisocratic colony
was to promote the ideal way of life that would lead to a more peaceful human being (Holmes
74). Their government by all would remove the “motives of evil,” such as private property
(Holmes 78). Coleridge felt that his colony would provide an ideal education that would not
allow any prejudices that were normally built into children from birth, since their prejudiced
natures were promoted by thoughtless fathers and uneducated mothers (Holmes 83). He wished
to eliminate all corrupt values beginning at very early childhood. Above all else, it was
important for the members of Coleridge’s society to be highly educated in a wide field of
knowledge. Coleridge states, “Whether a very respectable Quantity of acquired knowledge
(History, Politics, above all, Metaphysics, without which no man can reason but with women &
children) be not a prerequisite to the improvement of the Head and Heart?” (Letters 119). In the
end, it would prove to be problematic for the pantisocrats to determine what parts of their corrupt
society they should leave behind.
Southey and Coleridge had a major disagreement over the details of their new colonialism. To Coleridge, Southey may have been sticking too closely to traditional colonial ways of patriarchal power. Southey wanted to bring servants to the colony, and he also felt that women should do all of the domestic work and raise the children. Coleridge felt that all members of the colony should be equal. He pictured himself and Southey doing much of the manual work, such as farming, but he also felt that the men of the colony would help raise the children and take part in the domestic work:

Let the Married Women do only what is absolutely convenient and customary for pregnant Women or nurses—Let the Husbands do all the Rest—and what will that all be—? Washing with a Machine and cleaning the House. One Hour’s addition to our daily Labor—and Pantisocracy in it’s most perfect Sense is practicable.

(Letters 114)

Although Coleridge seems to underestimate the extent of work necessary to help maintain a household, and one questions whether Coleridge himself would have been willing to add the extra "hour" of labor in practice, he does see a necessity for men to assist with keeping order in the domestic realm. While men would seem to take up a greater role within the household, there is no indication that women would have held a greater role in the larger community outside of the home.

The youthful Coleridge sometimes saw the colony as a place for free love, where marriage contracts would be dissolved and where men and women would bathe “perfectly nude” together. However, despite his youthful, sexual fantasies, the pantisocratic plan involved some rather progressive thinking regarding women. There were some conflicts, however, with his idea of the place of women. On one hand, he wanted them to be equals, but on the other, he needed a way to control them, to educate or re-educate them in a way that kept them from corruption. For, as Nancy Armstrong’s text demonstrates, the female needed to be properly educated; only then would her domestic influence be a positive one. If a woman became too educated by certain values, say Christianity, then Coleridge found that woman dangerous to the colony:

I wish, Southey! In the stern severity of Judgment, that the two Mothers were not to go and that the children stayed with them—Are you wounded by my want of feeling? No! how highly must I think of your rectitude of Soul, that I should dare
to say this to so affectionate a Son! *That* Mrs. Fricker—we shall have her
teaching the Infants *Christianity*,--I mean—that mongrel whelp that goes under
it’s name—teaching them by stealth in some ague-fit of Superstition!— (Letters
123)

Coleridge is speaking out against what he feels is a corrupt form of Christianity. He feels that
the two women, the mothers that Southey wants to bring along have been improperly educated,
and thus their minds are more prone to superstition. It is the uneducated mind that will corrupt
his new society, just as it has corrupted the old society and its religion, Christianity.

Since Coleridge did not want to bring children to the colony, he seems to suggest that the
minds of the women he would have chosen to bring would be easier to manipulate than the
minds of children. James McKusick states that “[Coleridge] is writing the Book of Pantisocracy
as a foundational text for the entire community, but he intends it especially as ‘an advantage to
the Mind of our Women’” (124). Perhaps, in Coleridge’s eyes, the unwritten Book of
Pantisocracy would have been the ideal conduct book for women. Coleridge was willing to give
women more power though he was greatly concerned about his lack of control over that power.
The colonial men must be able to control the knowledge given to the women; they need to lay
the foundations for the domestic ideal:

Whether our Women have not been taught by us habitually to contemplate the
littleness of individual Comforts, and a passion for the *Novelty* of the Scheme,
rather than the generous enthusiasm of Benevolence?…In the present state of
their minds whether it is not probable, that the *Mothers* will tinge the Mind of the
Infants with prejudications?

*These Questions are meant* nearly as motives to you, Southey! To be
strengthening the minds of the Women and stimulating them to literary
Acquirements. (Letters 119)

These ideas further expands on Coleridge's theory that when left to their own devices, women
will not be sufficiently educated to fit into Coleridge's society. The women will bring with them
their own prejudices, which will taint the new society. In Coleridge's view, women can only
bring a positive domestic influence when educated by a man, which in the case would be
Southey. Colonial settlement is intrinsically violent, and Coleridge and Southey seemed to feel
the need for a domesticating influence. McKusick notes that, especially for Southey, the domestic presence would help negate the violent effects of settlement in this new world (114).

When discussing a colony, even one that is only theoretical, it is important to analyze how the colonized land is represented. Anne McClintock states that “the myth of the empty land is the myth of the virgin land.” If the empty land is conceptualized by the colonizer as a virgin, then the land is representative of a female body that is ripe for sexual conquest. From a colonial point of view, power over the virginal female body extends to a national level. McClintock notes Fanon’s observation that the female body represents white civilization and colonized lands (364). Domesticity is centered in the white female body. While the native population may be conveniently forgotten in such an empty land myth, this population will be recalled when the land is thought of as virgin. The native body is swept up in the virginal concept; the native body is waiting to be sexually conquered along with the land. The women of this land must be tamed and domesticated in order to bring European control over it. McClintock points out that colonialism is domestication.

If we think about the idea of the female body as a representation of civilization, it may be easier to understand Coleridge’s attitude toward women in relation to Pantisocracy. Coleridge had sexual fantasies about the idea of women in the colony. He envisioned “a number of fine Women bathing promiscuously with men and boys- perfectly naked!” (Letters, I, 93). Perhaps, these sexual fantasies were his way of envisioning control over the female body and thus, his colony. Coleridge's concerns over control, or possible lack of, over the female body may be why he was especially fearful of older women entering his colony. They could not be conquered sexually, or perhaps he may have felt unable or unwilling to imagine conquering them in that fashion. Either way, these older women would not represent the virginal female body of civilization in Coleridge’s eyes.

Coleridge did favor women’s rights to some degree. McKusick notes that Coleridge approves of Mary Wollstonecraft’s arguments for the rights of women (118). Coleridge seems to have some of her ideas in mind when thinking about his pantisocracy. To quote from Mary Wollstonecraft: “Women cannot, by force, be confined to domestic concerns; for they will, however ignorant, intermeddle with more weighty affairs, neglecting private duties only to disturb, by cunning tricks, the orderly plans of reason which rise above their comprehension” (5).
In the end, McKusick feels that while women may have gained some higher social status in Coleridge’s society, they would still have been left with a large portion of domestic work (118). McKusick also notes that Coleridge felt a sense of eroticism from the idea of liberated women, but of course, the idea of liberating them also frightened him (118).

IV. Conclusion: The Politics of Domesticity

In attempting to negotiate Coleridge’s place within the framework of a domestic ideal, a concept that attempts to define what the domestic household should represent and women's place in relation to that household (and that household's relationship to the larger outside world), I hope to have shown, at least in part, the importance of the domestic sphere in relation to the colonialism which is present in the construction of the Romantic ideology. Coleridge, like other authors of his time, attempts to take control of the presentation of the domestic realm, which will help reinforce the power structure of the emerging white male middle-class. To understand the importance of a domestic ideal in relation to the literature of Coleridge’s time, one must first understand the place of literature at that point in history. McClintock notes that “It should not be forgotten that the historical separation of literature and politics began at the moment in Western history when women began to read and write in large numbers” (304). It would seem that the constructed domestic ideal is ultimately part of a language that benefited men. Nancy Armstrong states that the middle-class domestic woman was possibly constructed by the literature that first represented her (258). In other words, she existed in print before she existed in a domestic household. It was not a case of life reflecting art, but an ideology posing as art forcing itself upon society. Inebriate

Domestic influence is an idea that some literature and other forms of writing such as conduct books, such as Sarah Stickney Ellis’ The Women of England, have perpetuated in order to maintain an ideological control of women. The domestic paves the way for colonialism in Ellis’ text:

Britain has sent forth her adventurous sons, and that is to every point of danger on the habitable globe, they have borne along with them a generosity, a disinterestedness, and a moral courage, derived in no small measure from the female influence of their native country (Ellis 18).

As this text shows, there were many who believed that women had a positive influence on the actions of the men who seek out British interests in the world. Through their domestic influence,
women have some control over men's actions in the colonial sphere. Of course, this assumes that the domestic influence actually was effective in a positive manner. There were those such as Coleridge, who believed that British colonists and those who acted in the name of British interests mainly spread cruelty. Coleridge believed that women did not exert enough of a positive influence due to the lack of a suitable education. In Coleridge's view, the women were more interested in crying over the imaginary pains of a novel's heroine rather than taking any sort of active role in lessening the suffering of others in the world, such as the Africans who were forced into slavery.

**Losing Control of the Domestic Voice**

McClintock states in her discussion of an African work of literature, *Poppie Nongena*, that popular opinion viewed the text as “apolitical because it is primarily concerned with a woman’s attempt to keep her family together. If politics has been separated from art, it has also been separated from the family….the family is seen to inhabit a sphere set apart from organized politics and history” (304). These interpretations of the text are the lingering effects of how literature has historically been defined in order to reinforce the male power structure. We have been taught to ignore the politics that are right in front of us. Nancy Armstrong states that:

> As it began to deny its political and religious bias and present itself instead as a moral and psychological truth, the rhetoric of reform obviously severed its ties with an aristocratic past and took up a new role in history. It no longer constituted a form of resistance but distinguished itself from political matters to establish a specialized domain of culture where apolitical truths could be told. The novel’s literary status hinged upon this event. Fiction began to deny the political basis for its meaning and referred instead to the private regions of the self or to the specialized world of art, but never to the use of words that created and still maintains these primary divisions within the culture. Favored among kinds of fiction were the novels which best performed the operations of division and self-containment that turned political information into the discourse of sexuality.

Armstrong places much emphasis on the historical separation of politics from the novel. While the novel would still contain political material, as all writing does, it would not be perceived as such by critics and other readers. As Armstrong states, a primary qualification for being
classified as literature is the book in question needed to be apolitical. It would not be art unless it was deemed to be separate from any political agenda. Many texts still contained political material intertwined within work that the culturally powerful deemed to be art.

Texts such as McClintock’s, *Imperial Leather*, and Armstrong’s, *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, teach us that we need to rethink the way literature is perceived. Armstrong notes that political power does not rest solely within the official state (26). Political power rests within the literature that molds our ideology, and it is an ideology in which we all are complicit in constructing (Armstrong 26-27). Political power also resides to a certain extent in what we call “literature”, whether it is Romantic poetry or an African text such as *Poppie Nongena*. We need to think about what groups are represented by the politics in the texts. While men have constructed the ideology of the domestic household in a fashion that grants greater benefits to themselves, Armstrong notes that we should not ignore the power that the ideology grants to middle-class females (26). However, when we assume that women writers have some power, we perhaps need to question how much the domestic language faithfully represents male power. Is it possible to read any writings of women of the 18\(^{\text{th}}\) and 19\(^{\text{th}}\) centuries as subversive if they represented the established (male) idea of domesticity? Are there women writers who are aware of the ideology and wish to turn it on its head, while at the same time appear to be reinforcing it? Is it possible for the men to lose control of the representation of the domestic space? Can the ideology become too female? When a female writer attempts to take control of the submerged politics in a text, do the rules for literary criticism change?

If we turn our attention back to Coleridge, then we can reflect upon the “moral” of “The Ancient Mariner.” The moral could be interpreted such as this: man should pay attention to the female influence, which has a softening effect on a man’s heart. It is possible that the moral of a story at that point in history could have been transformed into something feminine. In the attempt to separate politics from literature, critics may have found it necessary to ignore the moral of a tale. The moral had become a too uncomplicated idea, which has no place in complicated literature. Ellis informs her readers that the female sensibility makes a woman “the most delightful of fireside companions, because she is thus enabled to point the plainest moral, and adorn the simplest tale, with all those freshly-formed ideas which arise out of actual experience and the contemplation of unvarnished truth” (11). Images from “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” come to mind when she states that “the very feather on the stream may serve
to warm the doubtful mariner of the rapid and fatal current which his bark might be hurried to
destruction” (Ellis 16). Coleridge may have been arguing for the legitimacy of his poem when he
criticized it for having a moral message: “as to the want of a moral, I told her that in my own
judgment the poem had too much; and that the only or chief fault, if I might say so, was the
obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a
work of such pure imagination” (Table Talk, 2:100). In criticizing the moral message of his
poem, Coleridge is contributing to the myth that separates literature from any political agenda,
but he alerts his reader that he is aware of his manipulation of the idea of domestic virtue. It is a
defensive posture. In his eyes, he remains in control of his work, and it remains masculine, even
if it has conceivably from time to time called upon a moral.

Ultimately, understanding the place of the domestic ideology in the history of English
literature will help us re-evaluate literature and deal with the effects such as colonialism in a
more informed manner.
Sources


