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**SYMBOLISM AND MYTHOLOGICAL MEANING OF ANIMALS  
IN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN ROMANTICISM**

**SYMBOLIKA A MYTOLOGIE ZVÍŘETE V LITERATUŘE  
ROMANTISMU**

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Děkuji vedoucí práce Mgr. Alici Sukdolové za cenné rady, připomínky a metodické vedení práce. Poděkování patří i mým rodičům za podporu při mém studiu.

## **Abstract**

The aim of my thesis is to analyze the meaning of the animal-kinds in the chosen works of the English and American Romantic authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In my work, I concentrate on the works of five chosen authors: S. T. Coleridge, W. Wordsworth, G. G., Lord Byron, Herman Melville and E. A. Poe. The concrete images are concerned in terms of symbolism and mythology. Some biological facts and further information are added.

The work is divided into five main parts, which are then segmented into smaller subheads. The most of the animal images found in the works of the above mentioned authors concerns birds, even though the other animal images are also found.

## **Anotace**

Cílem mé diplomové práce je analyzovat obraz zvířecích druhů v dílech vybraných anglických a amerických romantických autorů 19. století. Ve své práci se soustředím na díla pěti vybraných autorů: S. T. Coleridge, W. Wordswortha, G. G., Lorda Byrona, Hermana Melvilla a E. A. Poea. Konkrétní zvířecí druhy jsou rozebírány z hlediska jejich symboliky a mytologického významu, přidána jsou i některá biologická fakta a další informace.

Práce je členěna na pět hlavních tematických okruhů, které se dále dělí na jednotlivé podkapitoly. Většina zvířecích obrazů, nalezených v dílech výše jmenovaných autorů, jsou ptáci, i když ostatní zvířata v nich také hrají nepostradatelnou roli.

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## 1 Introduction

The thesis concerns the animal symbols in the works of the chosen English and American authors of the Romantic period – Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, George Gordon, Lord Byron, Herman Melville and Edgar Allan Poe.

The work concentrates mainly on the symbolism of the animal images and mythology which is connected with the concrete animal kinds. It deals with such images as of the magical albatross in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the tremendous whale in *Moby Dick* or the tiny birds in Wordsworth's poems dedicated to Nature.

Animals were one of the earliest and most common motifs in mythology and fairytales all over the world. In Jungian psychology, animals are regarded as creatures which are more connected with the secret order within nature than people. Animals, these ancient fellows of mankind, got into human psyche as strong archetypal symbols and source of perpetual inspiration.

As the Romantic authors drew the inspiration from the natural order and from feelings, they often used the images of animals. Animals, instinctive and beautiful creatures who awake various human attitudes and feelings – aggression, fear or affection and love.

The thesis contains five main parts, each of them deals with one Romantic author and his concrete works which contain animal images. I chose various works, some of them are famous and some of them not so widely known.

The aim of the thesis is to analyze these animal images, their symbolism and meaning and to refer about mythology connected with them, adding a few biological facts.

I have chosen this theme to point out the importance of animals in the life of mankind, in its history and subconscious and to express the idea that animals deserve the place in our spiritual life and knowledge.



As the literary sources, I used mainly the edition by GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, BAYM, N. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of American literature*. Then the Czech literary criticism by PROCHÁZKA, M. HRBATA, Z. *Romantismus a romantismy*, critical essays by ABRAMS, M. H. (eds.) *English Romantic Poets* and BLOOM, H. *The Visionary Company* were needed.

In terms of mythology I worked mainly with HANNAH, B. *The Archetypal Symbolism of Animals.*, SAUNDERS, N. J. *Mytická síla zvířat.* and KOHANOV, L. *The Way of the Horse*. I also drew mythological and other information from the Bible.

I tried to connect the traditional conceptions and sources (e.g. the Bible) with information from the modern internet web-sites.

## 2 Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a significant figure of English Romanticism. His magical poems, mainly the impressive *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Gothic demoniac *Christabel* or the meditative conversational poems (e.g. *Frost at Midnight*) are known worldwide and were translated into various languages. Coleridge and his friend, William Wordsworth, established the so called “Lake School”, the literary centre of their era.

Young Coleridge, dreamy, enthusiastic, and extraordinarily precocious youth found a little intellectual stimulation at the university and left the school without a degree. However, the university education was not necessary for him to become an appreciated author and an important and influential literary theorist of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

Coleridge’s life was full of unstable shifts between success accompanied with happiness and slumps into the depths of depression and disillusion. The golden time for him began in the period of collaboration and friendship with William Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, in the late 1790s. His most brilliant works (*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, *Kubla Khan*) were created at that time.

After the year 1800, Coleridge went through the difficulties – disaffection to his wife, while hopelessly in love with other woman. Furthermore, his health problems stroke again. Coleridge suffered from heavy rheumatism and in accordance with the then medicine he was taking laudanum (a kind of opiate) to which he became addicted.

Better times for Coleridge came after 1808 when he started to give lectures on poetry. Especially his series on Shakespeare were very appreciated and fashionable event for the modern Londoners. The 1820s became the most balanced years of his

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<sup>1</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 424

literary activity and his marriage gain the peaceful understanding in his remaining years.

One of Coleridge's legacies was his innovative notion "*that culture, the nation's artistic and spiritual heritage, represents a force with the power to combat the fragmentation of a modern, market – driven society and to restore a common, collective life.*"<sup>2</sup> Coleridge stated against the soulless account of human nature of the political economy and such systems of thoughts. He raised difficult questions, for instance, the relation between poetry and philosophy, perception and imagination.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of the normative approach (to depict the realistic human nature), there is a new horizon which is the personality of the author and its authenticity. There are not only moral qualities and character hidden under the word "sincerity" but the very important rule of the Romantic poetics, "sincerity to Nature".<sup>4</sup>

"Nature" is a complicated concept. It includes the overwhelming life energy which can be found everywhere, in every single piece of creation, additionally in the countryside and its various shapes; mountains, forests, lakes, rivers and the states of weather – sunshine, rains, winds or storms. It is full of the living creatures, from the tiny insects hidden in the grass, fish flowing in the water, over the majestic animals, such as dears or horses to the lively flying creatures, the birds. And mainly the birds, these small inhabitants of the skies, are most frequent poetry of S. T. Coleridge.

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<sup>2</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 426

<sup>3</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 426

<sup>4</sup> HRBATA, Z., PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy*. Praha: Karolinum. 2005. p. 37

## 2.1 Birds in the Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge

“Birds of paradise”, nightingales, owls, doves, “bird of amethyst”, albatross and others – all those bird images appear in the lines of the magnificent poetry of S. T. Coleridge. Compared to another animal kinds, the bird images could be found in his poems most frequently.

Birds are very distinctive animal-kinds because of their special way of life. They live partly in close neighbourhood of human’s dwellings (some of the bird-kinds were domesticated hundreds of years ago and became inseparable parts of human life as a source of food, feather, etc.) and partly in distant places which were inaccessible in the ages of undeveloped technology. Their nests were hidden at distant places, higher than the man of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was able to achieve. The theory of the migration of birds was the next thing which was unknown for many years.

According to these facts, birds were shrouded with a gown of mystery. Also, the ability to fly was not fully understood until the invention of planes although the humans were always longing for flying, quite envying birds the splendid elegance of their flight. (This is the theme of the ancient Greek myth about Icarus, who flew with the wings from wax and feather made by his father Daedalus. Icarus disobeyed his father’s order – not to fly too high – and sun melted his wings and he died).

Birds have been flying high above human’s heads, appearing suddenly from “nowhere”, lingering for a while and than vanishing in the distant heights where maybe the heaven begins. No surprise that people used to believe that birds are supernatural links between God and people. They were said to be messengers from God himself, the Holy Ghost as his demonstrator and soul as the highest principle of human beings.

Stories about birds can be found all over the world. Their conception slightly differs in various cultures, even though there are some stories which are told throughout many cultures (e.g. tales of the swan maiden can be found in India, as well

as Ireland and Greenland, or the very well-travelled tale of the cranes).<sup>5</sup> Birds are understood as the symbol of immortality in the Middle Eastern and Asian cultures, in East Indian myth a bird represents a departed soul after one's death.<sup>6</sup>

For example, a widely spread belief was that birds which have black plumage, such as crows and ravens, were originally white and became black as a punishment for some crimes. Other interesting fact is, that lots of people used to believe (before the full understanding of the migration in the eighteenth century) that cuckoos turned into hawks for the winter months,<sup>7</sup> and many more.

There is a legend in the Christian non-biblical evangelical story that Jesus Christ created a bird simply by imagining the bird on his finger and letting it fly. Christianity operates most often with the concrete bird kind – a dove that symbolizes peace, conciliation and hope.

According to the Biblical legend, Noah sent the white dove to find out whether the great flood had abated. God had already been conciliated and the dove went back with a green sprig. From those times the white dove (in western cultures white colour is connected with innocence) symbolizes peace, reconciliation and a new beginning and also the Holly Ghost. Concerning Christian art, a bird often represented a saved soul. Christianity, as the strongest religion on the European continent, mainly the Catholic Church, influenced the general attitudes to the superstitions and beliefs of people to a great extent.

No wonder that images of birds appear in the works of the Romantic authors as the symbolical aspects. On the one hand, it was mostly a symbol of supernatural, mostly divine powers and on the other hand, the part of natural beauties around us.

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<sup>5</sup> TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. p. 10

<sup>6</sup> <[www.squidoo.com/divine-birds](http://www.squidoo.com/divine-birds)> 19<sup>th</sup> December 2010

<sup>7</sup> TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. p. 10

## 2.2 The Eolian Harp

The first poem where the image of the birds appears is *The Eolian Harp*, which was written in August 1795 in Somersetshire, devoted to Coleridge's wife, Sara Fricker. In Somersetshire, Coleridge was in contact with another great Romantic, William Wordsworth. Coleridge, Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy walked through the countryside and discovered the beauties of the local nature, which influenced Coleridge's later writings.<sup>8</sup>

The name of the poem – *The Eolian Harp* is taken after the special musical instrument called an “Eolian lute”, an “Eolian lyre” (Aeolus was the god of winds), or a “wind harp”. This special instrument was a common piece of house-hold furnishing. It was put in the window and as the wind was let to go through, it made a sound without any intervention of the human. It was often alluded into the Romantic works (e.g. Shelley's “Ode to the West Wind” – the last stanza, p. 772)<sup>9</sup>

The poem had originally been named “*Effusion XXXV*”, later revised and renamed it became a type of poem which he called a “conversational poem”, which means the blank-verse lyric poem of description and meditation, addressed to a silent author. (Coleridge's poems “*Frost at midnight*” shows the perfected poem of this kind).<sup>9</sup>

Coleridge started the poem with a gentle salutation to his wife and continues with the description of the natural beauties surrounding his house in Somersetshire.

The reader can almost smell the scent of “*white-flowered jasmine, and the broad-leaved myrtle...*”<sup>10</sup>, as the author writes the line below: “(*Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!*)”<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. Introduction, p. XVII

<sup>9</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 426

<sup>10</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p. 5

<sup>11</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p. 5

Then he continues with more and more aesthetically attractive conventional Romantic components, such as: stars at the night sky, murmur of the sea and then the Eolian lute placed in the casement. Mentionable is his usage of the light and dark contrast.

Then follows the description of the soft sound made by the lute, brought into a line with a maid yielding to her lover. Then continue the lines:

*“As twilight Elfins make, when they at eve  
Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,  
Where Melodies round honey-dropping flowers,  
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise.”<sup>12</sup>*

These so called “birds of Paradise” are the birds which can be found in New Guinea and the surrounding islands. The birds of Paradise belong to the family *Paradisaeidae*, which consist of more than three dozen of species. Their appearance is very special for their striking colours and bright plumage of green, yellow, blue and scarlet. They belong to the most attractive and dramatic birds in the world, because of their extraordinary colours. Bright colours and ornaments are displayed by males in a kind of a “love dance” to attract the females.<sup>13</sup>

The plumes of these birds are still used for dresses and rituals by the local inhabitants. The plumes were popular in Europe in the past centuries for ladies’ millinery. Due to this, the birds used to be hunted for and unfortunately, some of the species has been reduced a lot. Hunting of Birds of Paradise was finally banned in 1922 (in New Guinea). Nowadays the situation is even worse due to the deforestation and some of the species are listed as vulnerable.<sup>14</sup> The local inhabitants used to remove

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<sup>12</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p. 5

<sup>13</sup> <<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/bird-of-paradise/>> 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2010

<sup>14</sup> <<http://www.earthlife.net/birds/paradisidae.html>> 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2010

the legs when they prepared the skin from the birds. This fact led the Europeans to think that these birds were footless, just flying in the air, feeding on the nectar.<sup>15</sup> The natives believed that they were the Birds of the Gods and that they fed on dew until their death when they fell down.<sup>16</sup>

The imaginary affiliation of Birds of Paradise with “Gods” and their seeming way of life and ability to hover was maybe the reason why Coleridge put the image of the birds into this dreamy poem. These birds bring in the image of something supernaturally beautiful and extraordinary, as well as the Fairies in the Fairy-land, and finally complement the general themes of the beauty of love and marriage. The poem expresses the short period when Coleridge was happy in his approaching marriage.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.3 Frost at Midnight

The next poem where the image of bird appears is also a well known conversational poem, called “*Frost at Midnight*”:

*“The frost performs its secret ministry,  
Unhelped by any wind. The owlet’s cry,  
Came aloud – and hark, again! Loud as before.”*<sup>18</sup>

The first line “*The frost performs its secret ministry, unhelped by any wind*” leads the reader into the space of total calm and silence, reflecting the drawing made by the frost on the window. “*The owlet’s cry*” slowly enters this soundless space with its typically winter sound.

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<sup>15</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 426

<sup>16</sup> < [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birds\\_of\\_paradise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birds_of_paradise) > 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2010

<sup>17</sup> ABRAMS, M. H. (eds.) *English Romantic Poets*. Lexington: Oxford University Press, 2010. p. 191

<sup>18</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.14



The hooting of the owlet (or an owl) is usually associated with an unpleasant, gloomy feeling and is the sign of ill-luck (the role of owls in Coleridge's other poems will be mentioned later). On the contrary, in this case the feeling which the reader gets is not surprisingly unpleasant, but it deepens the calm and stillness of the frosty night. Owls mate in winter, particularly in February (the month of the poem's creation). It is the time when owls search for their partner and the hooting is a means of demarcation of their territory.

Coleridge did not use the word "owl", but owlet. Owlet with its diminutive meaning could relate to the young animal (baby), as well as it could represent the period of having babies in one's life. The poem as such continues with the images of the early childhood.

Coleridge's "*cradled infant slumbers peacefully...*"<sup>19</sup> and then later he expresses his tender paternal feelings, gently addressed to his son, sleeping in the cradle:

*"My babe so beautiful! It thrills my heart  
With tender gladness, thus I look at thee, ..."*<sup>19</sup>

The whole nature which surrounds them – the sea, hills, woods or sky and stars, seem to protect them in their embrace. The owlet is - in this case - a part of the reassuring scenery which is set at night. Through the feeling of happiness caused by fatherhood and the beauty of the scenery, the narrator feels the eternity of life and the unity with its never-ending circle.

*"The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language, which thy God  
Utters, who from eternity doth teach  
Himself in all, and all things in himself..."*<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.15

## 2.4 The Nightingale

The next bird which occupies other Coleridge's "conversational" poem and whose name was actually used as the name of the poem is *The Nightingale*.

The poem leads us again to the night scenery but this time it is a fresh and warm spring night. Two lovers are standing on the bridge, watching the sparkling stream below them. (The night is often used by the Romantic authors because of its mystery and dreaminess, oppositely to the day. The daylight is related to the reason whereas the night carries more intuitive and mysterious aspects). Then, similarly as in the *Frost at Midnight*, the sound of a bird can be heard:

*"And hark! the Nightingale begins its song,  
'Most musical, most melancholy' bird!"*<sup>20</sup>

The birds are often represented in the poetry of Romanticism by their voices which people perceive by the sense of hearing rather than by seeing. Hearing is more "mysterious" of intuitive sense than seeing, that is maybe why the Romantics use the sounds. It causes less reasonable perception, more dreaminess and awakes imagination.

Then he denies the upper characteristic of the Nightingale with the following words:

*"A melancholy bird? Oh! idle thought!  
In Nature, there is nothing melancholy."*<sup>21</sup>

These lines could express the author's admiration for nature, which he writes with the capital letter. He explains that "*there is nothing melancholy*" in nature. It only depends on the concrete man how he sees it. The openness of the individual

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<sup>20</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.19

<sup>21</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.19

to the salutary influence of the wilderness and desire to become a part of its eternal being is placed against the emptiness of the formalized language of culture.<sup>22</sup>

*“But some night-wandering man whose heart war pierced  
With the remembrance of a grievous wrong,  
Or slow distemper, of neglected love,...”*<sup>23</sup>

The majority of people consider the nightingale’s singing as a happy sound whereas to a broken-hearted person it could sound as a sad song and crying for the lost love and happiness. The perception of the surrounding world is a highly subjective thing, it is like a kind of glasses through which people see the world around them and react to it in a special and unique way. The subjectivity and individuality, on the contrary to the generalization, is also a typical sign of the Romantic period.

Nightingale is meant to be a messenger of spring (as well as a cuckoo). In general, nightingale is associated with the positive aspects. There is a superstition that if the nightingale is heard before the cuckoo it is a good omen. Nightingale represents success in love, whereas the cuckoo its opposite.<sup>24</sup>

The nightingale is said to be the best singer from all birds which live naturally in our surroundings. According to one folk tale, nightingale and the cuckoo argued about whose song is better. They chose a donkey to judge them (because of its large ears). The donkey decided that cuckoo’s singing is better and the nightingale was so ashamed that he now sings day and night to persuade people that his singing is better.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> HRBATA, Z., PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy*. Praha: Karolinum, 2005, p.19

<sup>23</sup>DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.19

<sup>24</sup> TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. p. 87

<sup>25</sup>TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. p. 87

Generally, the nightingale suggests love, longing and beauty. (Oscar Wilde wrote a tragic fairytale called *The Nightingale and the Rose*, where the nightingale sacrificed his life to help the hopeless boy to get the heart of his beloved girl by giving her a red rose. This red rose, which was originally white, could become red only when poured with the blood of the nightingale.

White is the colour of neutrality, innocence and emotional distance, whereas red is the colour of life, vital energy and love. Red symbolizes the life circle, blood and heart. Heart is not only a major organ but a centre of our emotion and feeling as well. The bird sacrificed himself and pierced his heart by the thorn of the rose to make it red. He gave all his life vitality for a bit of love.

#### 2.4.1 The Nightingale in Greek Mythology

There is a myth taken from the Greek mythology. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Sophocles' tragedy contain a tragic legend called Tereus, about a Greek princess, Philomela. (Her name is created on the Greek bases – "philo" – means to love, or loving and - "melos"- means song, in connection with a person who loves song or a song lover). Philomela is the daughter of Pandion and Zeuxippe, whose other child is Philomela's sister, Procne.

Procne married Tereus, king of Thrace (who was said to be son of Ares – the god of war). Tereus travelled to Athens and followed Philomela to Thrace for a visit. During the travel he began to crave terribly for the beautiful Philomela and raped her in the woods. After that Tereus cut out Philomela's tongue in order not to tell anybody about his terrible deed.

Philomela was clever and made a tapestry on which her story was depicted and sent it to her sister. Procne was shocked and upset and followed her husband's evil by next terrible deed – she killed their son, Itys and made a meal from him which she served to her husband. Tereus, not knowing about what was he eating, ate him.

Consequently, he tried to kill Procne and Philomela but the superordinate forces intervened and transformed all three wretches into birds.<sup>26</sup>

The concrete bird kinds in which they were changed quite differ according to various legends. As Sophocles wrote, Tereus was turned into a hawk or other bird with a big beak. (The beak due to its shape could be compared to a phallic symbol and consequently to the aggressive masculine sexuality which was the cause of the tragedy in this story). Aristophanes wrote he was turned into a hoopoe. Philomela was changed into a swallow and Procne into a nightingale.<sup>27</sup>

The sadness and violence of this myth brings into the nightingale's beautiful singing the aspect of sadness and deep tragedy. Sometimes it was regarded as a lament of a sad song of remorse.

The legend about Philomela and Tereus is not the only one which is somehow connected to a nightingale. According to Virgil, nightingale reminds of other Greek legend - about a famous mythical singer, Orpheus.<sup>28</sup> Orpheus was known for his glorious singing and music, which was admired by all people as well as by the wild animals which even stopped to listen to it.

Orpheus's life love, Eurydice, suddenly died, bitten by the poisonous viper. Orpheus's love was so deep that he went to Hades, the king of the underworld to ask for one more chance for life of his beloved wife. Hades, moved by Orpheus's suffering and his beautiful song, released Eurydice from the underworld. Sadly, during their way back, Orpheus lost her once more, and this time forever. He began his sad song for his lost love and unfortunately met the Bacchantes women who celebrated the god of wine, wine harvest and ecstasy, Dionysus. The Bacchantes were annoyed by Orpheus's laments and in their ritual madness killed Orpheus and parted his head from his body.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philomela\\_\(princess\\_of\\_Athens\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philomela_(princess_of_Athens))> 28<sup>th</sup> December 2010

<sup>27</sup> <<http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Pa-Pr/Philomela.html>> 28<sup>th</sup> December 2010

<sup>28</sup> <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orpheus>> 28<sup>th</sup> December 2010

<sup>29</sup> PETIŠKA, E. *Staré řecké báje a pověsti*. Praha: Albatros, 1971

Both legends – about Philomela and Orpheus could represent the negative, sad aspect of a nightingale.

The image of this bird is quite favoured by the English Romantics, it appears also in the poetry of William Wordsworth or John Keats (Ode to a Nightingale). Percy Bysshe Shelley in “*A Defence of Poetry*” said that:

*“A poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds, his auditors are as mere who feel that they are moved and softened, yet know not whence or why.”*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> A Defence of Poetry, Percy Bysshe Shelley <<http://www.bartleby.com/27/23.html>> 28<sup>th</sup> December 2010

## 2.5 The Image of the Albatross in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner

One of Coleridge's so called "Mystery poems" The Rime of the Ancient Mariner brought fame to Coleridge and became widely well-known. According to the poem, the new metaphor was settled and is sometimes used in the current language.

The idiom: "*An albatross around one's neck*" means: "burden which some unfortunate person has to carry"<sup>31</sup> or to be guilty of some nasty deed. The word "*albatross*" as such associates some encounter with negative circumstances, death or with an egoistic person. "*It is something that causes persistent deep concern of anxiety.*"<sup>32</sup> Or something that greatly hinders accomplishment.<sup>32</sup> This meaning of the albatross was catalogued in the Oxford English Dictionary in the 1950s and the use of the figurative meaning spread in the 1960s.<sup>33</sup>

The image of the Albatross appears in the first part of the poem, shortly after the old mariner began to tell his terrifying story to a wedding guest. The ship sailed in the nice weather, carried by the gentle fresh breeze but later it went into the frozen South Ocean, full of ice and snow, without any live creature, only green waters below them. No wind blows to get them out of there.

Suddenly, the good omen appears:

*"At length did cross an Albatross,  
Thorough the fog it came;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name."*<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> <[www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/30800.htm](http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/30800.htm)> 28<sup>th</sup> December 2010

<sup>32</sup> <[www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/albatross](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/albatross)> 28<sup>th</sup> December 2010

<sup>33</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albatross\\_\(metaphor\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albatross_(metaphor))> 28<sup>th</sup> December 2010

<sup>34</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.30

She brings a soft breeze and leads the ship to the warm lively water to the North. The sailors think that the bird is the symbol of God or the angelic force which helped them and lead them to safety. The bird follows the ship, plays with sailors who feed her. The bird followed them night and day, surrounded by the fog-smoke white, glimmering in the white moonlight.

From some illogical inner drive the ancient mariner slays the albatross with his cross-bow. The other mariners angrily blame the mariner for killing the bird and bringing the ill-luck to their voyage. But after the fog abated and the ship got into the Pacific Ocean, they approve of his deed. When they approve, they take the blame of a crime on them as well.

At this point, the curse over the ship starts. The ocean below them starts rotting, the “slimy things” wriggle on the sea level and the sailors suffer from the unbearably hot sunshine and lack of water. The hair-raising threat of an invisible Spirit is chasing the ship. The crew and mainly the mariner suffer from terrible fears evoked by devilish images.

The sailors blame the mariner for their misery and hang the dead Albatross over his neck:

*“Ah! well a day! what evil looks  
Had I from old and young!  
Instead of the cross, the Albatross  
About my neck was hung.”*<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.32



The ship is to go through other hardship, the wreck of the ship driven by two ghosts and illuminated by the hell-like blaze that encounters them. All sailors, except the old mariner fall dead to the ground. He has to experience the most terrible suffering, he is left alone on the ship full of corpses who are staring at him. He wants to pray, but it is not possible. Even death does not want him. He finds conciliation looking at to the night sky, stars and the moon.

The long watch of the night sky slowly changes his opinion on the creatures which are below him under the sea level. He finds them as nice creatures, there is a seed of love in his heart and he blesses them.

At this point, the curse is broken and the albatross slips off his shoulders and sinks into the sea. The refreshing rainfall begins and the breeze is back, the dead men rise. Then two ghosts (who loved the Albatross) follow the ship, the blood is flung on the mariner's head.

By this third punishment the curse is totally expiated and the ship is free and returns to the home harbour.

If the mariner had not kill the Albatross he would not have caused the problems and sufferings he evoked on the ship. His bad deed of killing of the "noble" bird was punished. From those times on, sailors have held the albatross in awe because killing the albatross was said to bring bad luck.

Despite the superstition, albatrosses were often killed by the seamen for meat and their long bones were used as parts of pipes. The North Pacific species were killed largely for their feathers. Plume hunters even raided some breeding groups (the feather was used in the millinery).<sup>36</sup>

Some species of these genera are very large, the Royal Albatross (*Diomedea epomophora*) with the wingspread about 315 cm. It is the largest creature in the air.

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<sup>36</sup> <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/12596/albatross>> 28<sup>th</sup> December 2010

In fact, it is the most mobile creature on the planet, there is no other animal which can move so fast and so far.<sup>37</sup> The albatrosses possess the ability of gliding aloft high in the sky without any motion for hours. The royal albatross, sometimes called a “wanderer” is maybe the one who figures in the poem.

The genera name *Diomedea* means “divinely cunning”, according to the name of the ancient Greek king Diomedes who figured in the Trojan War. He and his drowned companions were transformed into large white birds, the albatrosses.<sup>38</sup>

The theme of killing of the white animal, which is said to be sacred and could be the messenger from Heavens also appear in *Moby Dick*, written by the American Romantic author, Herman Melville, in the same period. The ship Pequod was destroyed after the killing the white whale, called Moby Dick and only one person, Ishmael, survived (similarly to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*). On the contrary, the whale was not killed but also destroyed the fate of the whole crew.

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<sup>37</sup> LINDSEY, T. *Albatrosses*. Collingwood: Csiro Publishing, 2008. p. 3, 5, 7

<[http://www.phil.muni.cz/plonedata/wkaa/BSE/BSE\\_1997-23\\_Scan/BSE\\_23\\_13.pdf](http://www.phil.muni.cz/plonedata/wkaa/BSE/BSE_1997-23_Scan/BSE_23_13.pdf)> 28<sup>th</sup> December 2010

<sup>38</sup> MARTIN, L. C. *The Folklore of Birds*. Old Seybrook: The Globe Pequod Press, 1993. p. 4

## 2.6 Christabel

*Christabel*, which belongs (with *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*) to the so called *Mystery Poems* was first published in 1816. Coleridge initially intended to publish the poem in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800). This was not finally fulfilled, even though the first part of the poem was written in 1797. There was a three-year gap between the first and the second part – the second part was written in 1800 after Coleridge's return from Germany and remained unfinished.<sup>39</sup>

The poem contains several animal images: a cock, a mastiff bitch, a dove, a snake, an owl and horses.

The reader encounters the first animal, a cock in the very beginning, the bird is represented by its typical sound:

*‘Tis the middle of night by the castle clock  
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock;  
Tu—whit!---Tu—whoo!  
And hark, again! the crowing cock,  
How drowsily it crew,’<sup>40</sup>*

### 2.6.1 The Crowing Cock

A cock is a bird which is connected with numerous legends and stories all over the world. A cock (or a rooster) was traditionally linked with the sun and was considered as the messenger of a new day. In the past, when no watches or clocks existed cockerels were “used” as alarm clocks and their crowing was a signal for the

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<sup>39</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Edition. Volume 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 449

<sup>40</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.57

farm workers to start their day. The crowing was also used by the Coptic Church in Abyssinia as a sign for its member to worship.<sup>41</sup>

In Greek mythology, the cock was dedicated to several gods. Mainly to the god of the sun, Apollo (because of its crowing as the sign of a new day, with the red colour of the cockerel's comb as a reminder of the sun as well). Cock was also sacred to Hermes (the winged messenger) and was associated with Ares, the god of war.

The cocks were used by the Ancient Greeks for making predictions. They gave the cocks grains of corn which were marked with letters of the alphabet and the order in which the bird ate them was carefully noted.

The Pagan beliefs in Central and North Europe link the cock with the god of fertility. In Britain, the cocks were involved in the harvest celebrations and fertility ceremonies when they were sacrificed, often in a cruel way. Cocks and hens were used also in healing and magical rituals.<sup>42</sup>

Cocks were involved in very strange Asian rituals which were often carried out in Taiwan and Fujian. Although the judicial system has been highly developed since the ancient times in Chinese culture there was sometimes the need for the personal solving of disputes. Therefore the Chinese people emphasize the importance of harmony, there was a special ritual which has been quite frequently used within the ancestries who preferred solving of problems in secrecy.

The so called "ritual court" was carried out by the beheading of a white cock while the oath was pronounced. The white colour of the cock was apparently chosen as the symbol of innocence. The oath of innocence was confirmed by the sacrifice of a white cock. The cock's execution could bring back trust in the accused man and was a means of easing the tension between both parties. It reminds of the cock fights in

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<sup>41</sup> TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. p. 3, 4

<sup>42</sup> TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. p. 3, 4

Bali, where the public were allowed to express their opinions about the concrete topic or dispute. The last “ritual courts” were done away within the 1940s.<sup>43</sup>

The crowing of the cock, which is natural in the morning, is usually considered a positive thing. The crowing was sometimes anxiously waited for, e. g. in the ballad of the Czech Romantic author K. J. Erben, *Wedding Shirts*. The young woman who escapes her demon lover and hides herself in the morgue anxiously withstands his attacks during night while anxiously waiting for the crowing of the cock that can release her from her suffering.

On the contrary, in *Christabel*, the initial use of the cock’s crowing at midnight is not a positive aspect. A few beliefs about ill-luck which is brought by the cock’s crowing at night and particularly midnight can be found in England.

According to one Scottish belief, the cock’s crowing at night was a very ambiguous sign for its owner. He was supposed to get up from bed and touch the cock’s legs. If they were warm it meant good news was on the way, if they were cold it meant that death was walking around.

In Essex and the West Country, the crowing of a cock at midnight was said to be a sign that death was about to come to someone inside the house.<sup>44</sup> This legend may have inspired Coleridge to use the image of the crowing cock at midnight to induce the terrifying atmosphere of fear and gloominess at the beginning of the poem.

The apprehension which is related to the cock’s crowing seems to be deeply embodied in the people’s subconscious. One of the oldest written sources, the Bible, also makes reference to it. The cock appears in Luke’s Gospel which is the part of The New Testament in which Jesus’s life, crucifixion and resurrection is described. Luke 22/31-38 refers to the dialogue among Jesus and his disciples.

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<sup>43</sup> OLIVOVÁ, L. (a comp.) *Zvířecí mýty a mytická zvířata*. Praha: Academia, 2010. p. 169, 170, 171

<sup>44</sup> TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. p. 3, 4

L 22/34: *“Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”*<sup>45</sup>

The prophecy was fulfilled later with a sad precision. Luke 22/54-62 tells about Peter’s Denial of Jesus. After Judas’s betrayal and Jesus’s arrest Peter sat at the fire. He was recognized to be one of Jesus’s disciples by a servant girl.

L 22/57: *“But he denied it, saying, “Woman, I do not know him.” 58 And a little later someone else saw him and said, “You are also one of them.” But Peter said, “Man, I am not.”*<sup>59</sup> *And after an interval of about an hour still another insisted, saying, “Certainly this man also was with him, for he too is a Galilean.” 60 But Peter said, “Man, I do not know what are you talking about.” And immediately, while he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” 62 And he went out and wept bitterly.*<sup>46</sup>

Potentially, all those legends and beliefs lead Coleridge to use the symbolism of the crowing cock at midnight at the beginning of Christabel, though maybe he did it unconsciously but the gloomy effect is apparent.

The poem continues and in the seventh line there appears the animal which is considered to be the closest animal-kind to humans, a dog. Again, its image is not usual but rather gloomy. “A toothless mastiff bitch” interrupts the gap in the midnight silence after the cock’s crowing with a howl:

*“Sixteen short howls, not over loud;  
Some say, she sees my lady’s shroud.”*<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> <<http://esv.scripturetext.com/luke/22.htm>> 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011

<sup>46</sup> <<http://esv.scripturetext.com/luke/22.htm>> 14<sup>th</sup> January 2011

<sup>47</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.57

## 2.6.2 The Warning Mastiff Bitch

Big dog's howling in the night emphasizes the fear which is led in by the crowing during the night. Animals in general are said to be more sensitive than people in sensing supernatural elements and even ghosts. The mastiff bitch is maybe able to sense the ghost of Sir Leoline's dead lady. Why did she appear that night? Did she want to warn her daughter, Christabel, of something evil about to happen?

In Czech, there is a saying which claims that "A dog is the best friend of a man." Does it work in the case of this poem? Does the mastiff bitch want to protect lady Christabel and sir Leoline against the misadventure which is about to happen?

The dog is one of the animals which was first domesticated (with sheep), about 15, 000 years ago. The dog is in fact a domesticated form of a grey wolf. Dogs have followed people from early times, helping them and protecting them.

According to the myths, it was not like this at the beginning of time. Barbara Hannah, a pupil and close friend of C. G. Jung, writes one chapter on the symbolical meaning of the dog in her major work *The Archetypal Symbolism of Animals*. Hannah's first part about the dog is called "*The dog: Friend and Betrayer*". Hannah mentions a myth (known in Asia and Eastern Europe) concerning the world creation. In accordance with this myth, it was the dog which made an agreement with the devil and betrayed man.

This Asiatic Ugrian legend says that God created the bodies of the first people without souls and left them on the Earth. These first people had a horny skin, like human nails and dogs were bare-skinned with no fur. God entrusted the dog to watch people and told him to be careful about the devil.

As soon as God had returned to Heaven (for the souls which will be given to people), the devil appeared and wanted to have the bodies. The dog started barking and wanted to protect them. However, the devil was very cunning and started to talk to the dog. He promised the dog a nice thick fur, so as not to be cold in the winter.

Then the devil spat at the dog and he grew a fur coat. He then spat on the human whose horny skin fell off, except for the nails, the place where his spittle gave out. Then God came back with the souls and got very angry. He cursed the dog to be in servitude to man till the end of ages.<sup>48</sup> The legend varies in different cultures.

As opposed to this legend, the best known role of the dog in mythology is that of the guide of souls which travel in the direction of the “next” world. The Mays buried dogs with their owners - to provide a companion for them in the immortal life.

There was an Asian custom to feed dogs with dead bodies, to speed up the process of metamorphosis into the eternal life. This tradition morally offended many people and maybe causes the belief that which remains to Muslims and Jews – that dogs are dirty animals.<sup>49</sup>

In Christabel, the mastiff bitch is a loyal guide of her master, sir Leoline. The bitch symbolizes the devoted guard who watches his master’s safety. She is said to see sir Leoline’s lady’s ghost because dogs and other animals as well are thought to live with a secret order within nature.<sup>50</sup>

### 2.6.3 White Geraldine and the White Horse

The very dark beginning continues in much lighter tune, the space gets enlightened and sparkling with the image of a young maid praying at the old oak tree in the glittering moonlight. The old oak tree is covered with moss and there is a mistletoe in its crown. Mistletoe (*Viscum album*) grows mainly on apple trees or pines, it rarely occurs on an oak. In the Celtic tradition, Mistletoe is regarded as a sacred and magical plant – mainly when it grows on an oak. The Celtic word for mistletoe means “All heals”, this plant was highly respected and only Druids were allowed to cut it from a tree.

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<sup>48</sup> HANNAH, B. *The Archetypal Symbolism of Animals*. Wilmette: Chiron Publications, 2006. p. 58, 59

<sup>49</sup> SAUNDERS, N. J. *Mytická Síla Zvířat*. Praha: Knižní Klub, 1996. p. 74, 75

<sup>50</sup> HANNAH, B. *The Archetypal Symbolism of Animals*. Wilmette: Chiron Publications, 2006.p. 59



The peaceful scenery in *Christabel* is interrupted by a moan. The scene is again filled with anxiety. It is apparent that there is a reason to be afraid about the safety of the lovely lady Christabel. The author even cries for the saints: “*Jesu, Maria, shield her well!*”<sup>51</sup>

Surprisingly, the stranger who appears on the scene is not a demon or a ghost but a beautiful lady dressed in white. She introduced herself as lady Geraldine. She claims she was kidnapped from her home by a group of wicked warriors.

She said she had been tied to the back of a white horse. The warriors who speeded roughly through the dark night have also ridden white horses. The white colour appears three times in connection with lady Geraldine.

The white colour contrasts with the darkness of the night. Its brightness fills the emptiness of the black night with a supernatural factor. In the western culture, white is usually associated with innocence, purity and humility.

On the contrary, in the eastern cultures (and also at some wild tribes of Africa) white colour is the colour of death and mourning. Brides in the western cultures are dressed in white, whereas in few eastern cultures white is the colour of funeral. It is the colour of the new beginning and the posthumous life, the colour of the supernatural. Not only higher powers as the bright angels are surrounded by the white light, it is the colour in which the ghost and other phantoms may appear.

Lady Geraldine also appears in white and as she claimed she had been kidnapped on the back of a white horse, which is quite strange, for the white colour is used as a symbol of innocence. Was the colour used as a deceit? Did she want to raise the sense of innocence?

White colouring is in fact the lower content of a pigment or its total absence. White animals are very rare in wild life. Whiteness is a big disadvantage for life

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<sup>51</sup>DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.59

(except the species which live in the snowy environment – but in that case the white fur or feather are not rare). The bright colour makes them well noticeable for the predators, so they are easily caught. Therefore, not many white animals survive till the age in which they are able to mate. According to this fact, they do not have enough time to pass their genes (which would again give the white colour to their offsprings).

Probably, the rareness of the white animals was the stimulus for the creation of many myths and legends about them. White animals were often said to be the disguised Gods: for example, there is a Greek myth about the highest god – Zeus who disguised himself into a white bull to gain the affection of the maid he desperately craved for. Europa was enchanted by the strong animal. Zeus made use of it, seduced her and kidnapped across the sea to the new continent which was named after the maid – Europe.

Lady Geraldine was, according to her words, also kidnapped, but on the back of the white horse. Only a few white horses were born in wilderness but have had a chance to survive because of the way of life in the herd and its size which makes them not so easily caught for most of predators.

There is one very interesting fact about white horses. Every single white horse (except albinos) is born as a black or dark foal. The fur of the animal begins to whiten progressively with the age. The polarity of these two opposite colours could be connected with the ancient link between the black and white, darkness and light, male and female energy – as the symbol of jin and jang. White cannot exist without black and vice versa.

Generally, the white horse is a symbol of very positive qualities. Lady Geraldine could be perfectly aware of this, pretending her innocence. Or maybe, if she really was kidnapped, her captors need not necessarily be evil villains. Therefore, the evil figures in ballads and fairytales are supposed to have black horses. This fact could lead us to a suspicion that she should not necessarily represent a noble quality but could belong to the type of dark creatures.

According to Linda Kohanov and her book *Way of the Horse*, the white horse is universally a messenger of wisdom, creativity, healing and redemption. In Celtic myths, white mare symbolizes Epona, the goddess of fertility and transformation. In accordance to Celtic legends, the Druids used white horses as oracles.

The Islamic prophet, Muhammed, is said to get his holy visions through the image of a white mare-like creature. The white-winged mare with a woman's head and peacock's tail called Alborah took Muhammed to heaven and back to earth again. Then he tried to share his insights with the world.<sup>52</sup>

Later, Lady Christabel takes Geraldine to her home. Christabel thanks in alleviation the "Virgin all divine". The reader feels a little relief but not for long. G. W. Knight in his essay *Coleridge's Divine Comedy* points out that the first part of the poem is "strangely feminine": "*the mastiff is a "bitch", the heroine set between Geraldine and the spirit of her own mother as forces of evil and grace respectively. "Mary Mother" and "Jesu Maria" find a natural home in the phraseology.*"<sup>53</sup>

As Geraldine and Christabel entered the gate, the sleeping mastiff bitch made an angry moan:

*" Never till now she uttered yell  
Beneath the eye of Christabel.  
Perhaps it is the owl's scritch:  
For what can ail the mastiff bitch?"*<sup>54</sup>

The narrator uses the "owl's scritch", therefore the owl links to a fearful and worrying bird. Apart from wisdom, the owl is a symbol of darkness and death.

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<sup>52</sup> KOHANOV, L. *Way of the Horse*. Novato: New World Library, 2009.

<sup>53</sup> ABRAMS, M. H. (eds.) *English Romantic Poets*. Second Edition Lexington: Oxford Paperbacks, 2010. p. 202

<sup>54</sup> DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.61

The terror begins in Christabel's chamber. Geraldine became wild and evil and forces Christabel to undress and lie in bed. Then Geraldine undresses herself. There's the note at line 253 that one more line referring about Geraldine's appearance is added in some copies: "*It was dark & rough as the Sea-Wolf's side*".<sup>55</sup> The rough skin as a Sea-Wolf's contrasts with the gentility of Christabel's beauty. Knight writes that "*some sort of sexual desecration, some expressly physical horror, is revealed in Geraldine's undressing.*"<sup>55</sup>

A sexual evil represented by Geraldine is contrasted with the parental good of Christabel's mother ghost. Supreme goodness is replaced in a surprising way by an ugly fact that such a pure and innocent girl can be exposed to such a horror.<sup>55</sup> It points out to the Gothic novel genre from which the Romanticism developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

*"It is something Christabel cannot confess: she is powerless to tell her father. She is under a spell."*<sup>56</sup>

The presence of evil in this part is really hair-raising. While Geraldine lies on the couch with terrified and hopeless Christabel in her arms – strangely reminding of mother and a baby, the night birds again gave hoots.

#### 2.6.4 The Dove and the Snake

Later, the bard, Barcy, had a vivid dream with a very metaphorical meaning. He saw a white dove, which was called the same as lady Christabel, alone in the forest underneath the old tree. She was flattering and crying on the ground, surrounded by the grass and green herbs:

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<sup>55</sup> ABRAMS, M. H. (eds.) *English Romantic Poets*. Second Edition Lexington: Oxford Paperbacks, 2010.p. 202, 203

<sup>56</sup> ABRAMS, M. H. (eds.) *English Romantic Poets*. Second Edition Lexington: Oxford Paperbacks, 2010.p. 202, 203

*“I stooped, methought, the dove to take,  
When lo! I saw a bright green snake  
Coiled around its wings and neck.  
Green as the herbs on which it couched,  
Close by the dove’s its head it crouched  
And with the dove it heaves and stirs,  
Swelling its neck as she swelled hers!”<sup>57</sup>*

The terrifying image represents a highly dangerous situation for lady Christabel, as innocent as a dove, killed by a poisonous green snake, which can be associated with the presence of lady Geraldine.

We can see very different qualities or let us say opposites of these two animals. The dove which represents Christabel demonstrates the high qualities, innocence and peace. In almost every culture, there is a reference of dove as a symbol of peace. In the time of the great flood, Noah sent a white dove to see whether the water had abated or not. When the white dove returned with a green sprig, it was the sign that God is reconciled and the flood is at its end. (The legend about the great flood is not only mentioned in The Old Testament, every culture in the world has its own conception of this myth).

The dove is also a symbol of love, mildness and a long and happy marriage. There is a marriage custom to release two white doves by the groom and the bride to bring them happy and long marriage full of understanding. The symbolism of white colour was mentioned above. Its representation of innocence and purity associates with the features of the dove perfectly.

The image of the dove in connection with Christabel assures the reader about Christabel’s qualities – mildness, innocence, devotion. There is another aspect of

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<sup>57</sup>DENT, J. M. (eds.) *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Birkenhead: Orion Publishing Group, 1996. p.73

a dove, not widely known, as Kohanov mentions in her book *Way of the Horse*: “The dove, long held as a symbol of peace and prophecy, is also associated with maternity, female sexuality and mourning.”<sup>58</sup>

This fact could lead us again to sexual aspects which occur in a few parts of the ballad. Christabel represents innocence, virginity, devotion to God, whereas Geraldine is a complicated mature woman, aware of her sexuality, which affects in a negative and terrifying way. We still do not know what or who Geraldine is, we can just guess she belongs to the creatures of the dark side of life.

Geraldine is connected with a “bright green snake” which kills the snowy white dove. In the western culture which is tightly bound with Christianity, the snake is often perceived as a symbol of evil and darkness. It is one of the animals which frighten people. Some people have a phobia of snakes or other serpents (who are cold-blooded creatures with a bare body. It has no fur or feathers, just a smooth surface covered with small scales).

The body of snakes is in a compact unit, with no limbs, neck or head. It has two small eyes, hackly tongue and big sharp, often poisonous teeth. The range of the snake’s colours is quite wide. Their colour varies from the dark shades of brown, grey and beige to bright colours. Snakes are usually very timid creatures which are not interested in human company, they usually flee away when they encounter people. This fact shrouds them with mystery.

The way they kill their victims is also terrifying. The snakes can be divided into poisonous snakes and constrictors. Except few species (e. g. the black mamba), they do not attack gratuitously. The Europeans fear snakes much more than they are worth as for only a few cases of snake bites are fatal.

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<sup>58</sup> KOHANOV, L. *Way of the Horse*. Novato: New World Library, 2009. p. 209

The body shape of snakes resembles the shape of phallus, the symbol of the male aggressive sexuality. (Sigmund Freud assigns the snake's archetype mainly to sexuality because of its shape).

The conception of the snake varies a lot throughout cultures and continents. In Greek mythology, the snake is dedicated to Gaia, goddess of the Earth. It is also connected with the underworld, the ancient Greeks believed that the souls of the dead people incarnates into snakes. The snake is associated with the dark powers in accordance to the legend in which the python fought Apollo, the sun god.

The Sumatran legend considers the symbolism of the snake similarly, there is the legend that one day the enormous cosmic snake will rise from the underworld and destroy the whole world. In Chinese culture, the snake is one of the twelve zodiac sign and a symbol of wisdom and a new beginning.

In the *Archetypal Symbolism of Animals*, Hannah approaches the snake from various sights: "the serpent as a spirit of light and wisdom", the mythical Uroboros (the snake with its tale in the mouth creating the cyclical round) as a symbol of the life cycle, as a "Demon of the Earth, Darkness and Evil" and the traditional Christian point of view of the snake which is the case of the image of snake in the poem.<sup>59</sup>

Hannah reminds that the serpent appears at the beginning of Genesis. She points out that the snake was here at the very beginning of human history. It is claimed in the third chapter of Genesis that the serpent "*was more subtle than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.*"<sup>59</sup> Then it continues with the story of the fall and the snake is punished by God, considered as evil and sent away. Nevertheless it is a subtle figure no more.<sup>59</sup>

Christabel begs her father to send Geraldine away but sir Leonile is enchanted by the mysterious beauty. Bard also says that he should send lady Geraldine away for his

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<sup>59</sup> HANNAH, B. *The Archetypal Symbolism of Animals*. Wilmette: Chiron Publications, 2006. p. 193

daughter is in danger. However, sir Leonile overrides his daughter's asking and bard's warnings, thinking that Christabel is only jealous of the newcomer.

The story ends here and evokes questions. Will Christabel be saved or will Geraldine destroy her? The incomplete story lets the reader use his/her imagination and think of his/her own ending of the story.

An optimist would suggest that Christabel will be saved. Maybe, some supernatural force (in form of her mother's ghost or an angel) will intervene and help Christabel in her horrific situation.



### 3 William Wordsworth

William Wordsworth is known as a great innovator in English poetry, a devoted lover of nature, an advocate of the French Revolution, a close friend of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and one of the main members of the Lake School.<sup>60</sup>

Wordsworth was born on the northern edge of the English Lake District. His parents died when he was a child. He spent his childhood near Esthwaite Lake, just in the region which became later the English poetic heart.<sup>61</sup>

Young William spent his free days (and sometimes nights) exploring the marvellous, scarcely populated countryside. He used to walk through wilderness, perceiving images and sounds, seeing the God's creative power in every single piece of creation, little golden daffodil or a flying butterfly. Reflexion of the natural images and the encounter with the local people (shepherds, cottagers and wanderers) is reflected in his works.<sup>61</sup>

During his studies (1790) Wordsworth travelled on foot with his college friend, through the Alps and France. He spent some time in London and France as well. Wordsworth fell in love with the daughter of local surgeon, Annette Willon. They decided to get married. However, before the marriage was carried out (Wordsworth's daughter was born) he had to return to England because of the lack of money. Meanwhile, the war broke out and made impossible for Wordsworth to return back to France to his family.

He felt guilt of leaving Annette and small Caroline, disillusion of the Revolution and divided loyalties between England and France caused his emotional breakdown which is also reflected in some of his works.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> WORDSWORTH, W. *Selected Poems*. England: Penguin Popular Classics, 1996. Preface

<sup>61</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 243

Later, after recovering a little from his despair, he settled at Racedown, Dorsetshire with his sister, Dorothy. At this time, Wordsworth met Samuel Taylor Coleridge and they started a long-lasting and fruitful friendship.

The best time of his poetic career was about to start. Coleridge claimed Wordsworth as “the best poet of the age”. They spent many hours together by talking about poetry, writing and walking through the countryside. Their close friendship worried some people who thought that they were not poets but political plotters.<sup>62</sup>

This collaboration brought one of the most important books of that period, *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems*, which was first published anonymously.<sup>62</sup> It opened with Coleridge’s famous *Ancient Mariner*, contained various poems celebrating nature and life of the poor rural people. It closed with the Wordsworth great poem, “*Tintern Abbey*”.

“*This poem inaugurated what modern critics call Wordsworth’s “myth of nature.”*”<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth puts a new norm of poetry, which is the “loyalty to the nature”, the ability of poetry to express the basic emotional excitement, united for all people which are connected with nature. One of the conditions of the loyalty to the nature is to copy an ordinary colloquial speech.<sup>63</sup>

According to Wordsworth, the purist form of the colloquial speech can be found in separated rural places, where the life and work of the settlers carries out in harmony with natural rhythms and actions.<sup>64</sup>

Nature is for Wordsworth the overflowing source of good, emotions and creative energy. In *The Prelude* he confessed that this “sacred” nature became a source of inspiration in his youth.

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<sup>62</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 243, 244

<sup>63</sup> HRBATA, Z. PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy*. Praha: Karolinum, 2005. p. 18

<sup>64</sup> HRBATA, Z. PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy*. Praha: Karolinum, 2005. p.170

He experienced happiness which flows from the creative perception throughout which we can see the “hidden ties” within things which are not commonly understood as related. The unity of nature is a cumulated effect of the numerous emotional relations within the natural creatures and objects, within everything that “*jumps, runs, cries, trills, flaps its wings, swims in water...*”<sup>65</sup>

Wordsworth celebrates in his poems even the smallest creatures of nature, from various flowers, such as: daffodils, primroses, daisies, celandines to subtle or larger animals: butterflies, sky-larks, sparrows, linnets, lambs, etc.

### 3.1 To a Butterfly

One of the “*Poems Referring to the period of Childhood*” is devoted “*To a Butterfly*”. The poem starts with an asking:

*“Stay near me – do not take thy flight!  
A little longer stay in sight!”*<sup>66</sup>

In the following lines the lyrical subject continues that the butterfly evokes him a period of his own infancy and his “father family”. He reminds of the day of no worries, just pure happiness:

*“Oh! pleasant, pleasant were the days,  
The time, when in our childish plays,  
My sister Emmeline and I  
Together chased a butterfly!”*<sup>66</sup>

Then, the narrator says he became a “hunter” for whom the butterfly was easy prey but his mild sister did not want to touch a butterfly, not to brush the dust off its wings.

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<sup>65</sup>WORDSWORTH, W. *Selected Poems*. England: Penguin Popular Classics, 1996. Preface

<sup>66</sup>Ibid p. 1

The butterfly in this poem symbolizes the games of childhood. It was a common game for children who lived in the countryside to try to catch the butterflies. There are some tales, which says that the butterfly led children into the fairylike land where those children experienced wonders and miracles. Those wonders and miracles may be experienced in our “normal” world as well. Chasing the butterfly, children just run, do not perceive anything but waving of the colourful wings which takes them to the world of their own fantasy.

The butterfly is the subtlest flying creature which can be found in our neighbourhood. These creatures do not usually have the long-lasting life expectancy, some species die after few days of their full maturity. Some butterflies migrate and are able to travel thousand of miles, e.g. the monarchs whose gathering takes place every year in the woods of north Mexico.

The butterfly is a symbol of transformation, in order to its own interesting and unusual life cycle. The fertilized female lays eggs from which caterpillars are hatched. The caterpillars eat and eat until there is a time for them to make a cocoon. They stay in the cocoon for couple of months, than the new butterfly is about to see the light of the world. The process of the metamorphosis is very mysterious, even today the scientists do not know what exactly happens in the cocoon before the new butterfly is “born”.

From the spiritual point of view, the butterflies symbolize the single phases of human’s life, concluding the “flight” of soul to the posthumous life.

Generally, the butterfly is a symbol of insouciance, joy, frivolity and even flirting – because of its flying from blossom to blossom. In Greek mythology, the goddess Psyche’s name also means a “butterfly”. Her beauty, as wonderful as the beauty of a butterfly infatuated the god of love himself, Eros.<sup>67</sup> Except the last named aspect, the role of the butterfly in Wordsworth’s poem agrees with the general qualities of butterflies.

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<sup>67</sup> SAUNDERS, N. J. *Mytická síla zvířat*. Praha: Knižní Klub, 1996. p. 128

The butterfly here does not only evoke the memory of happy childhood but in addition the bitter-sweet remembrance of his family members who are not alive.

### 3.2 The Sparrow's Nest

The next poem which contains an animal image is also from the "*Poems Referring to the Period of Childhood*", it is called "*The Sparrow's Nest*". The first stanza refers to the sparrow's nest, discovered by the narrator as a child.

*"Behold, within the leafy shade,  
Those bright blue eggs together laid!  
On me the chance-discovered sight  
Gleamed like a vision of delight."*<sup>68</sup>

The nest full of eggs is a symbol of home, security, assurance and usually motherhood. On the contrary, in this poem, the full nest refers more to fatherhood because the following lines speak about "*My father's house, in wet and dry*"<sup>68</sup>. The emphasis on the paternal aspect in connection with the cosy and secure home could be caused of the author's own life, the early death of his mother. Consequently, the image of home is for him more connected with his father than mother.

Sparrows are little brown-grey birds which are very common in big cities as well as in the countryside. They primarily feed on seeds and little insects but they do not scorn almost any other food which is offered them. Therefore, they are connected with humility and modesty.

There is a reference to a sparrow in the Bible. Psalm 84:3 which generally refers about the generousness of the Lord's "dwelling place" says that:

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<sup>68</sup>WORDSWORTH, W. *Selected Poems*. England: Penguin Popular Classics, 1996. p.2

*“Even the sparrow finds a home,  
And the swallow a nest for herself...”<sup>69</sup>*

The sparrow here represents modest, humble people who want to live in the Lord’s kingdom. The sparrow symbolism reminds us that we do not have to have either big mammon, or the strongest and loudest voice to be heard for happy living.

Sparrows are used to living in huge flocks. They move, eat and mate in clusters, they gain their safety in numbers. The hen sparrows are very protective and vigilant mothers. That is why the sparrows are meant as the symbol of parenthood.

Hereafter, the lyrical subject reminds his happy years of childhood and his beloved sister.

### 3.3 Sky-larks in the Poems of William Wordsworth

Two poems in different Wordsworth’s collections refer to the same animal topic – *To a Sky-lark* in the *Poems of Fancy* and a poem of the same name in the “Poems of Imagination.”

Eurasian skylark is a small, mainly brown bird with a small blunt crest on its head. It has white edges of its wings and tail which are visible only when flying. Skylarks are quite common throughout the whole Europe, Asia and north Africa, eastern populations migrate to the south in winter. However, the population is declining since the 1980’s because of the agricultural intensification. According to the extremely large range of this species it does not approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the range size criterion.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The Bible, English version <<http://esv.scripturetext.com/psalms/84.htm>> 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011

<sup>70</sup> <<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/speciesfactsheet.php?id=8177>> 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011

<<http://users.netnitco.net/~legend01/lark.htm>>10<sup>th</sup> March 2011

<<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skylark>>10<sup>th</sup> March 2011

The skylark belongs to the so called “passerine” birds which are usually songbirds which live near the ground and have four toes arranged to allow for gripping the perch. Skylarks are masters in hiding their nests amongst vegetation (sometimes in bracken) on the ground.

Skylarks usually live in the open farmland and heath where they can be seen hovering in height about 50 to 100 metres just as a small dot in the distant bright sky. The hovering and singing at one time is a means of the males to attract females. Female skylarks prefer the males which can hover and sing longer (the usual length of the skylark’s song is about two to three minutes or little longer). The male which can hover and sing for a long time proves that he is likely to be generally physically strong.<sup>71</sup>

### 3.3.1 The Skylark as a Pilgrim of Heaven

Generally, the image of a skylark is connected with exaltation. The verb “to lark” or “to skylark” means to play tricks of practical jokes, this expression was originally used by sailors.<sup>72</sup>

Skylarks have inspired many authors and music composers. Other English Romantic, Percy Bysshe Shelley also devoted one of his poem *To a Skylark* (1820). There is a song, originally French about a skylark. It is called “Alouette” (l’alouette is a French name for skylark) and is popular in French-speaking Canadians, particularly in Québec. Rather a cruel song about plucking the feathers off a skylark is favourite mainly among children. The song was brought to Canada by the American doughboys who served during World War I in France.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> < <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skylark> > 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011

<sup>72</sup> < [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alouette\\_\(song\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alouette_(song)) > 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011

*To a Sky-lark* (1825) in the *Poems of Imagination* is a celebration of this extraordinary singer so distant from the mundane life worries while flying high in the sky:

*“Ethereal minstrel! Pilgrim of thy sky!*

*Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?”*<sup>73</sup>

The lyrical subject asks her whether she thinks of her nest which is left on the ground while flying high in the sky. He exalts the skylark upon the nightingale:

*“Leave to the nightingale her shady wood*

*A privacy of glorious light is thine;”*<sup>74</sup>

He speak of the skylark as of a pilgrim of heavens who *“pour upon the world a flood of harmony”*<sup>74</sup> with divine instincts who: *“soar, but never roam: True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!”*<sup>74</sup>

The skylark which flies, from our point of view “close to the Sun” that she “nearly” touches the Heaven is therefore said to be “bright”. For the lyrical subject, the skylark is a messenger between *“Heaven and Home”*, thus she leaves her nest on the ground, touches the Heaven and returns back to her “dear”. This bird is also considered as a symbol of a prayer which is carried from the Earth to Heaven.<sup>75</sup>

There are many myths about skylarks. In the Near Eastern mythology, the skylark is said to be the first creature in the world. It carries a creator inside the crest of his head. In other cultures it is said to be the “Spirit of the Wheat” because it helps the wheat fields to get rid of locust eggs and other insects which destruct the harvest. These destructive creatures are in the Christian culture associated with evil, whereas a skylark is connected with Christ as a bread-giver.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> WORDSWORTH, W. *Selected Poems*. England: Penguin Popular Classics, 1996.p.134

<sup>74</sup> WORDSWORTH, W. *Selected Poems*. England: Penguin Popular Classics, 1996. p.134

<sup>75</sup>< <http://users.netnitco.net/~legend01/lark.htm>> 10<sup>th</sup> March 2011



An earlier poem *To the Sky-lark* (1805) taken from the *Poems of Fancy* is more complicated. It starts with a joyful shouting: “*Up with me! up with me into the clouds!*”<sup>76</sup> The lyrical subject is led by the skylark’s song, trying to find her in the sky in the form of a tiny spot:

“*Lift me, guide me till I find  
That spot which seems so to thy mind!*”<sup>76</sup>

Then the lyrical subject speaks about his previous days in which he had to sustain troubles and unpleasant feelings walking through “*wildernesses dreary*” after which his heart is “*weary*”. He wishes to take the “*wings of Feary*” and soar up to the banqueting-place in the sky where skylark flies.

The second part of the poem points out the bird as being rather mocking: “*Thou art laughing and scorning*”, lazy a little, drunk with his high flight. Then the narrator speaks about his tough journey through the “*prickly moors*” and “*dusty ways*”. The skylark’s singing brings him hope again:

“*By hearing thee, or others of thy kind,  
As full of gladness and as free of heaven,  
I, with my fate contented, will plod on,  
And hope for higher raptures, when life’s day is  
done.*”<sup>77</sup>

The poem is tuned in a melancholic way, there is an obvious difference between the bright highs where the skylark flies and the “*rugged and uneven journey*” through the life which is sometimes rough. The lyrical subject longs for the better things when the life is in an end.

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<sup>76</sup>WORDSWORTH, W. *Selected Poems*. England: Penguin Popular Classics, 1996. P. 74

<sup>77</sup> WORDSWORTH, W. *Selected Poems*. England: Penguin Popular Classics, 1996. p.75

### 3.4 Birds in the Poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge

In general, sparrows and skylarks are birds which are common in human dwellings (and used to be at time of Wordsworth and Coleridge even more). They are parts of the common life of people in the countryside. Wordsworth used these usual bird species to express the natural feelings, attitudes and behaviour of the modest rural people. The main colours of sky-larks and sparrows are brown and grey, the same as the colour of the simple linen clothes of the rural people. These people used to live in the simple conditions which countryside could offer them but were able to perceive harmony from the wilderness and live with humility and devotion in their hearts.

On the contrary, Samuel Taylor Coleridge used the bird images which carried different connotations. The most distinctive bird image of his poetry is the albatross whose shift of her enormous wings changes the fate of the crew including mainly the ancient mariner. White colour of the bird refers to higher power, the connection with the transcendental overwhelming energy.

Coleridge also operates with a female aspect which can be found in *Christabel*. Not only the two main characters are women, a few animal images were chosen in the female variants – mastiff bitch and dove. The feminine aspect seems to be essential in *Christabel*, Coleridge was not afraid to operate with a strong feminine energy which was “forgotten”, “hidden” or let us say prohibited for ages.

Coleridge’s mystery poems have the power to edify the reader to the higher, transcendental levels. There is something very unique, almost magical about Coleridge’s poems which takes the reader into the another mythical world.

To conclude, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were two significant English poets and friends who enriched Romantic poetry and complement each other perfectly.

#### 4 George Gordon, Lord Byron

Lord Byron is one of the best known English Romantics and the worldwide prototype of literary Romanticism. There was a cultural trend in the 19<sup>th</sup> century called “Byronism” and a typical hero of the Romantic works who is “Byronic”.

Byron achieved an enormous reputation already during his lifetime. He influenced works of various artists including famous authors, such as Balzac, Stendal, Pushkin and Dostoyevsky or Melville, painters – especially Delacroix or composers – Beethoven and Berlioz.<sup>78</sup>

He came from an aristocratic family line, his ancestors were passionate, violent and rather dissolute. Byron had an adventurous and scandalous life, this passionate young man did not hide his interest in women. However, the most shocking was a love affair with his half-sister. Admired by women, he was considered as extraordinarily handsome, S. T. Coleridge wrote about Byron that he: “*scarcely ever saw...his eyes the open portals of the sun-things of light and for light.*”<sup>79</sup>

Byron had a ruling, passionate personality which was admired by his contemporaries. This kind of personality became the characterisation of that which is called “Byronic”. Byronic hero is mysterious, rather gloomy, powerful, passionate, sometimes an outcast or an alien. The feeling of a nameless guilt pushes him from place to place, often to inevitable tragedy. As prototypes of such heroes could be mentioned Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, Ahab in *Moby Dick*, Eugene Onegin in Pushkin’s poem of the same name, or Vilém in *Máj*, poem of the Czech Romantic author, Mácha.

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<sup>78</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 608

<sup>79</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 609

Byron brought a different type of poetics. It abounded with the intensity of feelings in his communication through the verse. There is a “*force, fire, and thought*” and “*the vividness of the sense of self*”<sup>80</sup> which Byron’s contemporaries found in his verse.

#### 4.1 The Prisoner of Chillon

Byron wrote the poem in 1816, inspired by his travel throughout Switzerland with his friend, Percy Bysshe Shelley. They visited the Castle of Chillon which is located on the bank of Lake Geneva (Lac Lemman). The Castle was used as prison in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. An imprisonment of a Swiss patriot, Francois Bonivard, inspired Byron to create a poem about his suffering in the damp dungeon.<sup>81</sup>

The main motive of the poem is the loss of freedom and imprisonment. At the beginning, lyrical subjects tells us about his tough fate, about his prison. He describes the gloomy surrounding, there are seven Gothic pillars in the “*deep and old*” dungeon, each pillar has its chain for the prisoners to bind. The seven pillars refer to the sad fate of men in his family – he is one of the six brothers, the only one who is still alive. His father died at the stake. The same terrible fate met one of his brothers, two brothers died in a battle, two brothers were imprisoned in the same dungeon and died there.

Death of the youngest brother in the dungeon is a tough experience for the lyrical subject. The youngest brother was beloved by his father because he was given “*our mother’s brow*” and whose eyes were “*as blue as heaven*”.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 608

<sup>81</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Prisoner\\_Of\\_Chillon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Prisoner_Of_Chillon)> 9th April 2011

<sup>82</sup> SKELTON, R. (eds.) *Selected Poems of Byron*. London: Heinemann, 1964. p. 94

*“For him my soul was sorely moved;  
And truly might it be distress’d  
To see such bird in such a nest;  
For he was beautiful as day –  
(When day was beautiful to me  
As to young eagles, being free) – “<sup>83</sup>*

#### 4.1.1 Eagles - The Kings of the Sky

The brother is brought into line with the bird and a cold dungeon with the “nest”. The nest should symbolize a safe retreat and shelter for the bird, here it functions in a paradoxical manner since the dungeon resembles a home by no means. Then the simile “*beautiful as day*” follows. But the beauty of the day is there only for those who are free, as young eagles.

Eagles belong to the biggest and most beautiful birds of prey. They are members of the bird family *Accipitridae* which contain about sixty species. Most of the species can be found in Europe and Asia, only two of them live in the United States and Canada. Some species of these noble birds were at the brink of extinction, especially in the 1970s. In the era of Byron, they were common.<sup>84</sup>

Eagles belong among the animals which have one of the sharpest sight in wildlife. They have big hooked beak (which is necessary for them to tear flesh out of their prey) and strong sharp talons in which the bigger species can carry the prey even as large as a doe.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> SKELTON, R. (eds.) *Selected Poems of Byron*. London: Heinemann, 1964. p. 94

<sup>84</sup> <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eagle>> 9th April 2011

<sup>85</sup> <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/eagles/introduction/3089/>> 9th April 2011

Eagle's females lay eggs into the so called "eyries" which eagles build on the high cliffs or in the crowns of very tall trees. Most of eagles lay two eggs. The eagle's siblings are often rather intolerant to each other. The first hatched bird is very dominant and aggressive and usually kills the second, younger and smaller chick.<sup>86</sup>

According to this fact, it is quite interesting that the lyrical subject used the metaphor of the eagle's nest and an eagle in connection with his younger brother. Even though he, oppositely to eagles, was affectionate to his younger brother but he was the one who survived – just as the older eagle.

#### 4.1.2 Eagles in Myths

The eagle is a symbol of power, resurrection and courage. These birds got into the folklore thousands years ago. The eagle was dedicated to the Sumerian god of fertility, tempest and war who was worshipped three thousand years before Christ.<sup>86</sup>

Greek mythology concerns eagles as well. There is one about Periphas who was so noble and devoted that he was built a temple. The highest god, Zeus, got angry and sent thunderbolts on the temple to destroy it. After some time, Zeus caught Periphas and his own wife making love. Furious god turned Periphas into an eagle. Periphas's wife went to Zeus to ask him whether he could turn her into a bird, as her husband because she was in a big distress without him. Zeus was touched of her love and turned her into a vulture.<sup>87</sup>

More famous Greek legend tells about Prometheus, descendant of the Titans who loved people. He stole fire from Zeus and gave it to people. Zeus got furious and

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<sup>86</sup> TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. p. 41

<sup>87</sup> TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. p. 42

punished Prometheus by binding him to the rock of the Caucasus. Every day, the enormous eagle appeared and tore Prometheus's livers out of his body. During night, the livers grew again and all process repeated. For the memory of Prometheus's bravery and suffering, people wear rings with a small stone in it. This theme is reflected upon also by Percy Bysshe Shelley in Prometheus Undbound.

Eagles have strong connection with Christianity. They represent the strength of spirit. Many churches have lecterns in the shape of an eagle, which stems from the Revelation (4:6-7):

*“And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a plying eagle.”<sup>88</sup>*

Deuteronomy (32:11) also refers to an eagle. There, the eagle is identified as a sign of God's power over the people:

*“like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.”<sup>89</sup>*

The eagle is connected with heaven and the sun. Aristotle claimed that it can gaze into the sun, close to God and it was considered to possess divine powers. Later, an eagle became the symbol of Christ, stands for the virtues of faith and courage.<sup>90</sup> An eagle flying over the sea level and catching fish was understood in the medieval art as a symbol of christening and liberation of the lost souls by Christ. Sometimes, the eagle also represented St John the Evangelist.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> <[http://www.discoverrevelation.com/Rev\\_4.htm](http://www.discoverrevelation.com/Rev_4.htm)> 9th April 2011

<sup>89</sup> <<http://niv.scripturetext.com/deuteronomy/32.htm>> 9th April 2011

<sup>90</sup> <[www.squidoo.com/divine-birds](http://www.squidoo.com/divine-birds)> 9th April 2011

<sup>91</sup> TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008. p. 44

The fight between an eagle and a bull (or a lion) represented the triumph of spirit against the rough powers. An eagle with a snake in its beak symbolized the victory of spiritual powers over the devilish ones. If an eagle and a snake do not fight against each another but stay peacefully together, their mutual depiction means the unity of the spirit and matter.<sup>92</sup>

The eagle, as a symbol of strength, fearlessness and power used to be depicted at shields and banners which were carried into battles by various armies. An eagle became a national symbol of the ancient Persians and Babylonians. The most famous ancient soldiery who had an emblem in the form of an eagle were the ancient Roman legions. Then, it was adopted by the French army during the Napoleonic Empire.<sup>93</sup> During the WWII the Nazi used an image of the black eagle on the red background as one of their signs.

Modern English has a few idioms concerning an eagle. Somebody who: “*has eagle eyes sees everything; no detail is too small*”.<sup>94</sup> Someone who is “eagle-eyed” is “*incredibly meticulous and misses nothing*.”<sup>95</sup>

Other myth refers to so called “eagle stones”. These stones could be found in the nests of eagles. (Similar kinds of these stones are also in the swallow’s and raven’s nests). Eagle stones were said to be magical and would help eagles which were thought of having difficulties with laying eggs. These stones were created of two layers. The inner layer was usually red or black with yellow spots. It had a smaller stone inside the outer casting. The stone was said to be helpful for women who had difficulties with childbirth.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>SAUNDERS, N. J. *Mytická síla zvířat*. Praha: Knížní Klub, 1996. p. 115

<sup>93</sup>TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008p. 46

<sup>94</sup><<http://www.usingenglish.com/reference/idioms/eagle+eyes.html>> 9th April 2011

<sup>95</sup>TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008p. 46

<sup>96</sup>TATE, P. *Flights of Fancy: Birds in Myth, Legend, and Superstition*. New York: Delacorte Press, 2008p. 46



#### 4.1.3 The Bird with Azure Wings

In Byron's poem the *Prisoner of Chillon*, the life of prisoner's second brother ended soon after death of the youngest of them. He was a strong man, "*a hunter of the hills*",<sup>97</sup> but the coldness of the dungeon withered his spirit.

After the loss of his brother, the prisoner sank into a deep despair. He longs for death but it did not come. He felt as being buried alive under the level of Lac Lemman. The only thing which remained was faith which did not allow him to give up his life:

*"I know not why  
I could not die,  
I had no earthly hope but faith,  
And that forbade a selfish death."*<sup>98</sup>

The prisoner began to lose his feelings slowly, he became a broken man - as tough as the stone pillars around him. The day after day passed without any change when suddenly a gleam of hope appeared and broke through the silence and nothingness:

*"A light broke in upon my brain, -  
It was the carol of a bird;  
It ceased, and then it came again,  
The sweetest song ear ever heard..."*<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> SKELTON, R. (eds.) *Selected Poems of Byron*. London: Heinemann, 1964. p. 95

<sup>98</sup> SKELTON, R. (eds.) *Selected Poems of Byron*. London: Heinemann, 1964. p. 95

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* p. 100

It was a tiny bird, “*with azure wings*”<sup>100</sup> which came every day to please the prisoner with its lovely song. The blue lining around the bird’s wings reminds of the saying that “every cloud has a silver lining.” The song of the bird brought new hope to the prisoner, he was able to perceive again the things around him and regain his lost feelings.

Blue colour of the bird’s wings symbolises freedom, blue is the colour of the sky and the sea – two endless positive entities. In many cultures, blue colour represents soul and eternal life in heaven. The blue bird is a good omen for the prisoner, it promises better days to come. He even thinks of a bird as of “*a visitant of paradise*”<sup>101</sup> or his brother’s soul which came down to him.

Nevertheless, the days were flowing and spring came, the prisoner could watch a tiny distant island through the small dungeon window. He could see green trees, smell the gentle breeze which comes through the window. There was a full spring – but not for him. He longs to become one of the white sails which were flowing on the lake to go freely wherever he wanted. The fish which frolicked in deep water below him, or a noble eagle flying around – all these signs deepened his misery.

The prisoner finally reconciled with his fate, did not even think of the possibility he could be released. He adjusted to the damp dungeon, it became his “second home”. He claimed his chains became “his friends”, he made friendship with creatures which are usually thought by people as awful, the spiders and mice.

One day, he was released: “*Regain’d my freedom with a sigh.*”<sup>102</sup> He waited for so long to see his freedom but he was so tired of life that he could react only by a sigh. He was then “as free as a bird” but was he able to live, as a free person, after the years of imprisonment?

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid. p. 100

<sup>101</sup> SKELTON, R. (eds.) *Selected Poems of Byron*. London: Heinemann, 1964. p. 101

<sup>102</sup> SKELTON, R. (eds.) *Selected Poems of Byron*. London: Heinemann, 1964. p. 104

The freedom of birds contrasted with imprisonment of the human, therefore the usage of motifs of animals – the birds is paradoxical.

#### 4.2 Childe Harold's Pilgrimage – Canto III

*Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* also deals with images of the particular animals, mostly birds. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* is, in fact, a travelogue narrated by the hero who had a lot in common with the author himself. Byron hesitated with the publication of *Canto I* in 1812, in order not to reveal too much about himself, thus the poem had many autobiographical features. However, it brought him an instant fame: “*awoke one morning and found myself famous.*”<sup>103</sup> quoted Byron later.

The lyrical subject can be called that of Byronic – “childe” is a medieval term for a young man who wanted (and was waiting) to become a knight.<sup>104</sup> He was a passionate, melancholic, well-read and extraordinarily eloquent young man. In the first two cantos, Byron insisted that “Childe Harold” was “a fictitious character”, but in the manuscript version he called the hero “Childe Burun” which was the early form of his own family name.<sup>105</sup> In the fourth canto, Byron used frankly the first dramatic persona.<sup>105</sup>

*Canto III*, published in 1816 (just after the break up of Byron's marriage), described the travel through Belgium, up the Rhine to Switzerland and to the Alps. Harold Bloom considers *Canto III* as a poem which: “*marks Byron's first imaginative maturity.*”<sup>106</sup> The poem opens with a remembrance of the subject's daughter who is left on the land. She is called “*Ada*” which is the second name of Byron's own

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<sup>103</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.p. 609

<sup>104</sup> <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childe>> 10th April 2011

<sup>105</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 609

<sup>106</sup> The BLOOM, H. *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1971.p. 238

daughter, Augusta Ada, born a month before her parents separated. In fact, Byron never saw her again.<sup>107</sup>

The lyrical subject just hopes to see his baby again, while standing on board of his ship which carries him away:

*“Once more upon the waters! Yet once more!  
And the waves bound beneath me as a steed  
That knows his rider. Welcome, to their roar!”*<sup>108</sup>

#### 4.2.1 The Water Steeds

He thought of the sea and particularly of the waves as of the steed which can carry him away. Horses are often connected with the water element, the Greek god of the sea, Poseidon, was said to have a carriage pulled by the water steeds, called hippocampi, which were extraordinarily quick and powerful horses with the fish-like tails. The name hippocampus was later used as a Latin name for the fish genus, known as a seahorse. (The part of the brain is also called hippocampus because of its shape which is almost similar to the shape of a seahorse).

The “sea steeds” could be helpful and dangerous at one time. They could save the person who drowns in the sea by carrying him to the shore, or they could easily drift the swimmer away into the open sea where he possibly gets drowned.

There is a Scottish legend about water horses, called “Kelpie”. These creatures were rather dangerous. According to the legends, they usually took the form of small horses (or even humans), sometimes black or green with seaweeds in their manes.

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<sup>107</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 619

<sup>108</sup> STABLER, J. (eds.) *Lord Byron*. London: Orion Publishing Group, 1997. p. 14

The Kelpies were supposed to wait near the fords and tempted the exhausted travellers to take them across the water. Who did not resist, got possibly drowned.<sup>109</sup>

Kelpies were also known as stealers of human young women who were taken by them as wives. There is a story about Kelpie's wife who escaped his captor although she did not want to leave her little child in the "water-world". When she arrived home, the wild storm began and in the morning she found the dead body of her son in front of her door. This legend is almost identical with the ballad called "A *Merman*", written by a Czech Romantic, and a collector of the folk stories, Erben.

The idea of water-horses was not live only in the past, it seems to be hidden in the subconscious of modern people in the Anglo-Saxon culture, and other cultures which have Celtic roots. The image of water horses was also used in the best contemporary fantasy, *The Lord of the Rings* based on the lengthy novel by J. R. R. Tolkien. Beautiful white steeds which arose from the river helped to destroy the black riders.

#### 4.2.2 The Falcons

As the waves carried him away, the lyrical subject in Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage - Canto III* thought of his sorrows, of his "heart and harp have lost a string"<sup>110</sup>, of the possible intensity of feelings which would hurt him again. He bears the fate with honour, although we can feel slight bitterness in his words.

He says about himself that he is:

*"Restless and worn, and stern and wearisome,  
Droop'd as a wild-born falcon with clipt wing;"*<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> <<http://fantasyhorses.homestead.com/water.html>> 10th April 2011

<sup>110</sup> STABLER, J. (eds.) *Lord Byron*. London: Orion Publishing Group, 1997. p. 15

<sup>111</sup> STABLER, J. (eds.) *Lord Byron*. London: Orion Publishing Group, 1997. p. 16

Falcons are beautiful birds, usually of grey colour, according to the myths they represent “*a light that shines in the darkness.*”<sup>112</sup> The genus *Falco* contains over thirty-five species, which can be found all over the world, except Antarctica. Falcons live in wide-open areas, especially close to water, along rivers, lakes and coastal areas.<sup>113</sup> Falcons are the quickest creatures in the world - when they hunt, they sight their prey, make a swift dive which can reach the speed of 200 miles an hour (320 kilometres an hour).

Some falcon species migrate widely, they nest on Arctic tundra and for winter they move to South America, which is about 15, 500 flown miles (25, 000 kilometres) in one year. Once they favour some particular place, they come back in the following years, there are some nesting sites which have been used by generations of falcons for hundreds of years.<sup>114</sup>

The population of falcons has seriously decreased during the 1950s because of the widened use of pesticides. Especially, in the United States, falcons became an endangered species. The DDT pesticides represented a danger for falcons which lay eggs into the hollows in the rocks or trees, or just directly into the soil. The contaminated soil distracts the eggshell and the female then breaks the eggs by its own weight. Dangerous is also eating of the prey which has been contaminated. Fortunately, the “pesticide crisis” is over and the population of falcons has widened in recent years.

The mythology of falcons has its roots mainly in the Ancient Egypt mythology, where a falcon was connected with an important and revered god, Horus. Horus was believed to appear as a “Pharaoh’s falcon”.<sup>115</sup> A falcon was associated with the “Eye of Horus” which was able to see everything on Earth because his right eye was the sun

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<sup>112</sup> <[www.squidoo.com/divine-birds](http://www.squidoo.com/divine-birds)> 10th April 2011

<sup>113</sup> Folklore of Birds, Martin, L., The Globe Pequot Press, Old Saybrook, Connecticut, 1993, p. 55

<sup>114</sup> <<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/peregrine-falcon/?source=A-to-Z>> 10th April 2011

<sup>115</sup> <[www.squidoo.com/divine-birds](http://www.squidoo.com/divine-birds)> 10th April 2011

and his left eye the moon. Falcons symbolized the flight of the soul into the immortal life, the Egyptians thought of him as of the “king of all birds”.<sup>116</sup>

In Greek mythology, a falcon was dedicated to the Sun god, Apollo, because he was thought, similarly as in the Egyptian mythology, to see everything, just as the sun.

In Norse mythology, falcons were associated with Freya, the goddess of love and fertility (and also the guardian of the dead). She was said to use a magical cloak made of falcon’s feathers to travel between the worlds in a form of a falcon.<sup>117</sup>

A falcon is also perceived as the symbol of victory throughout various cultures. According to the Japanese legend, when the mythical Japanese emperor, Tenno Jimmu, landed on the Japanese shores, the wild bird, which is said to be a falcon, appeared and set on the bow of his ship. Since that time, a falcon is for the Japanese a symbol of victory and undertaking.<sup>118</sup> To get the Military Medal of Honour, where a falcon is depicted, was the highest estimation for the Japanese.<sup>119</sup>

A falcon is also mentioned in the Bible. Deuteronomy 14:1-21 refers about the animals which are suitable for humans to eat and those who are forbidden. In 14:12 -13, the bird species which we may not eat are named:

*“But these you may not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the black vulture, the red kite, the black kite, any kind of falcon, ...”*<sup>120</sup>

Job 28 deals with a question where wisdom can be found. It speaks of human knowledge how to reach the precious minerals, and metals, such as: lapis lazuli, gold or silver. But no one knows where wisdom and understanding can be found:

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<sup>116</sup> SAUNDERS, N. J. *Mytická Síla Zvířat*. Praha: Knižní Klub, 1996.

<sup>117</sup> <[http://www.pauldfrost.co.uk/intro\\_f2.html](http://www.pauldfrost.co.uk/intro_f2.html)> 10th April 2011

<sup>118</sup> MARTIN, L. C. *The Folklore of Birds*. Old Seybrook: The Globe Pequod Press, 1993. p. 55

<sup>119</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military\\_Medal\\_of\\_Honor\\_\(Japan\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Medal_of_Honor_(Japan))> 10th April 2011

<sup>120</sup> <<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy%2014&version=NIV>> 10th April 2011

*“No bird of prey knows that hidden path,*

*No falcon’s eye has seen it...”*<sup>121</sup>

In the following lines, Job says that no creature on Earth (even the sharp-sighted falcon) can find the real wisdom without discovering God.

A falcon has its place in the history of England, at the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Sir John Stanley got the Isle of Man by Henry IV. Henry’s condition was that Sir Stanley will give him two falcons and then the two falcons will be given to every future king of England on their Coronation Day. This tradition sustained the following four hundred years.<sup>122</sup>

In Medieval Europe a new way of hunting game which involved falcons or other birds of prey was developed, falconry. It was called after falcons because they were most suitable birds for this “sport”. The first records about falconry are from the ancient China, dating back to 2, 000 BC but this source is still discussed (there is a sporadic question whether the historians understood the depictions of people with falcons in a right way).

The choice of the bird kind depended on the social role of its owner. The top position belonged to eagles which could be used only by emperors, falcons were used by kings, princes and dukes, sparrow-hawks were reserved for priests, while the plebeians were supposed to use kestrels.<sup>123</sup>

The falconry required a long training of birds which was in the past rather insensible to birds. Many tools are necessary for falconry – a hood, a pair of bells and two strips of leather which are tied to the bird’s legs. Birds get used to feeding from the falconer’s glove in order to come back from every flight.

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<sup>121</sup> <<http://niv.scripturetext.com/job/28.htm>> 10th April 2011

<sup>122</sup> <[http://www.pauldfrost.co.uk/intro\\_f2.html](http://www.pauldfrost.co.uk/intro_f2.html)> 12th April 2011

<sup>123</sup> <<http://www.britishbirdlovers.co.uk/articles/the-history-of-falconry.html>> 12th April 2011



Modern falconers say it is a sport combined with art. Falconry is also used for practical reasons - at big airports to prevent smaller birds from flying into the area where planes take off and land.

#### 4.2.3 Eagles and Heroes

Harold then continues his journey and comes to the battle-field of Waterloo:

*“And Harold stands upon this place of skulls,  
The grave of France, the deadly Waterloo!  
How in an hour the power which gave annals  
Its gifts, transferring fame as fleeting too!  
In “pride of place” here last the eagle flew, ...”*<sup>124</sup>

It was only a year ago when Napoleon was defeated at the battle of Waterloo, near Brussels, on June 18, 1815. This place where almost fifty thousand soldiers (from England, Prussia and France) were killed in one day became a horrific tourist attraction.<sup>125</sup>

Here, the eagle is the symbol of Napoleon (as the Napoleon’s army has an eagle as its sign). “Pride of place” is the term used in falconry which means the highest pitch of flight.<sup>126</sup> According to Bloom, the poem broods on the fate of “Prometheanism”,<sup>127</sup> lyrical subject secretly likens Napoleon to Prometheus, the fallen Titan (an eagle has the major role in the legend about Prometheus).

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<sup>124</sup> STABLER, J. (eds.) *Lord Byron*. London: Orion Publishing Group, 1997.p. 17

<sup>125</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006. p. 622

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* p. 622

<sup>127</sup> BLOOM, H. *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1971. p. 241

There are two animal symbols in the following stanza where the lyrical subject speaks of the fall of France:

“...*Shall we, who struck the Lion down, shall we  
Pay the Wolf homage? profferin lowly gaze  
And servile knees to thrones? No; **prove** before ye praise!*”<sup>128</sup>

The Lion is a symbol of Napoleon and the revolutionary thoughts, whereas the Wolf refers to the winning Grand Alliance and its kings. Byron saw the defeat of Napoleon as the victory of tyrannical kings and victory of the tyrannical reign over Europe. Many other liberals of Byron’s era stated the same opinion.<sup>129</sup>

Both the lion and the wolf belong in the class of beasts of prey. The lion is a dangerous animal, the symbol of power, courage, desire and possession. Lion is often used as a state symbol (e.g. Bohemia). The wolf is rather a negative symbol as it is said to be cunning and deceitful.<sup>130</sup>

From Belgium, Harold travelled in the direction of Switzerland and the Alps. Sailing around Geneva, he reminds of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a big figure of the era of Enlightenment.

Then, the lyrical subject speaks of the surrounding, about the Lac Lemman and the mountains around. Byron’s conception of Nature differs from that of Wordsworth – “*he seeks the summits of nature for his own sake but because they show “how Earth may pierce to Heaven, yet leave vain man below.” Byron desires to be alone that he may “love Earth only for its earthly sake.”*”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> STABLER, J. (eds.) *Lord Byron*. London: Orion Publishing Group, 1997. p. 17

<sup>129</sup> GREENBLATT, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Eighth Ed. Vol. 2. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006p. 623

<sup>130</sup> HANNAH, B. *The Archetypal Symbolism of Animals*. Wilmette: Chiron Publications, 2006. p. 282

<sup>131</sup> BLOOM, H. *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1971., p. 241, 242

Stanza 96 concerns Byron interpretation of Nature. There could be a possible influence of Percy Bysshe Shelley with whom Byron spent the gloomy summer of 1816. According to Peter Cochran, an author specialized on Byron: “*For Byron, Nature is another self – or rather, a reflection of his own ego, another way of rendering himself, not patient and philosophical, but more volcanic, alienated, and dramatic in the eyes of the world.*”<sup>132</sup>

#### 4.3 Birds in the Poems of Byron, Coleridge and Wordsworth

To conclude, Byron chose mostly noble birds of prey as representatives of animals in his poems. The overwhelming nature of eagles or falcons should seem similar to passionate Byron.

The selection of big and splendid birds is mutual for Byron and Coleridge. However, Coleridge’s birds are not those of prey. On the one hand, birds in Coleridge’s poems are also of enormous kinds, on the other hand, they lack the aggression which is distinctive for birds in Byron’s poetry. Birds in Coleridge’s poetry are more like the messengers from the other world, shroud with dreaminess.

Although Wordsworth used birds’ images also the most frequently, he chose the ordinary, common bird-kinds which live near our dwellings. Their beauty resides in the simplicity and humility, characteristic to the ordinary human life.

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<sup>132</sup> <[http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/childe\\_harold\\_31.pdf](http://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/03/childe_harold_31.pdf)> 13th April 2011

## 5 Herman Melville

When the term “American literature” is pronounced, many people immediately think of *Moby Dick*, an amazing novel by Hermann Melville.

Melville was underappreciated at his own era and later admired as a genius writer. He was born into the well established and famous family, both his grandfathers were Revolutionary heroes. Life of young Melville changed dramatically when he was only twelve. At that time, his father died and left the family in huge debt. Melville, although still a child, was taken from school and required to work. He experienced various kinds of jobs – he worked in a bank, as a shop assistant, a farmer helper and a teacher.

Later, in 1839, Melville was not able to find any work and decided to get on board of the ship which went to Liverpool and back, as a cabin boy. The uncertainty of employment forced him to set on to the voyage as the member of the whaler ship, *Acushnet* in 1841. Aged twenty-one, Melville travelled as the member of the crew of *Acushnet* to the far South Sea. Conditions on whalers were extremely rough which causes Melville to escape in Nukahiva, in the Marques.<sup>133</sup>

Melville lived for a short time with a tribe untouched by Western culture which is reflected in his later works. First of his novels, *Typee*, written in 1846, drew on inspiration from these experiences. The novel became a huge succes, as it combined the anthropological novelty and adventure. Melville’s second work, *Omoo*, was also well received.<sup>134</sup> The author’s experience within the tribe is reflected also in *Moby Dick*, by choosing one of the characters as a “barbarian” from the Indonesian islands, Queequeg.

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<sup>133</sup>BAYM, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Seventh Ed. Vol. B. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007.p. 2304

<sup>134</sup> BAYM, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Seventh Ed. Vol. B. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007.p. 2305

The following work, called *Mardi*, represented a turning point of his literary career. This lengthy and highly philosophical novel remained a difficult text for most readers and spoiled Melville's literary reputation.<sup>135</sup>

## 5.1 Moby Dick

However, the greatest work by Herman Melville is doubtlessly *Moby Dick*. The conception of the work varies from: “*a relatively straightforward whaling narrative to something that aspired to be a “Gospel in this century” (as Melville termed the novel in an 1851 letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne).*”<sup>136</sup>

Melville attempted to edify the travel-narrative genre to the spiritual and philosophical level. “*He presented travel as an epistemological quest mediated through the language of narrative.*”<sup>137</sup>

At the time of the creation of *Moby Dick*, Melville befriended with Hawthorne, who was influential for Melville's writing. However, the influence of other great authors – Shakespeare, Milton or Emerson is significant. *Moby Dick* became a book about whales and whaling which rose questions about narration and interpretation.<sup>138</sup>

*Moby Dick*, a white whale, the tremendous and powerful animal symbol which arose from the depth of the endless ocean, provoked people's feelings and then vanished into the dark-blue depth.

Wherever it appeared, it caused troubles. The cause of these troubles was not intended by the animal itself, it just awoke the feelings and passions hidden inside human mind. The phantom of the *White Whale* forced humans to do unexpected and

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<sup>135</sup> BAYM, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Seventh Ed. Vol. B. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007.p. 2305

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. p. 2305

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. p. 2305

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. p. 2305

irrational deeds. Irrational, unreasonable and changeable, as the water element to which this animal belongs.

In modern psychology, water is a symbol of psyche and subconscious, water symbolizes the inner instincts and feelings. Life began in the water and every mammal is first in a little “sea” inside his mother’s belly.

Blue depths are covered with mystery, the most fantastic beasts, we can hardly imagine, live there. We can understand these water depths as the depths of our subconscious and the beasts as hidden aspects of our psyche. People often do not want to identify with aspects which could be socially inaccurate. Consequently, they try to hide the negative emotions, such as aggression or anger. These states of mind could possibly erupt, maybe in a shape of an enormous beast which could, without being careful, possibly overwhelm us.

### 5.1.1 The Whale

Moby Dick was an old enormous white sperm whale, a legend of whale fishery. Some whalers did not believe that Moby Dick was real, they thought of him as of a phantom. However, Captain Ahab could persuade everyone who doubted the truthfulness of Moby Dick, by his bitten leg. Since that, Ahab was obsessed with the idea of killing the white whale.

Sperm whales are the largest representatives of the family of Toothed Whales. These enormous mammals reach from 12 to 18 metres (males are typically 30-50% longer than females), the weight is 25, 000 – 50, 000 kg. The size of an average sperm whale is similar to the size of a double-decker bus.<sup>139</sup>

The feature which makes them easily distinguished among the other whale species is a relatively huge head with a prominent rounded forehead. Another

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<sup>139</sup> <<http://www.whale-images.com/info/sperm-whale-facts.htm>> 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011

noticeable sign is the roughness of the skin on their back, whereas other whales are all smooth. The sperm whale has the largest brain among all living creatures.

Heads of Sperm Whales contain large quantities of a special white substance, called spermaceti, which used to be mistaken for sperm.<sup>140</sup> The function of spermaceti is still not fully understood. Common theory is that the fluid helps whales with diving and rising again. Spermaceti, which has the ability to harden to wax when cold, was a very expensive and wanted business article in the nineteenth century. Whalers hunted Sperm Whales mainly because of this valuable substance.

Sperm Whales are very sociable animals, only old males prefer living in seclusion. They migrate to higher latitudes and then back towards the equator to mate. Females stay in groups of approximately twelve adult animals and their young (calves). They stay the whole year in warm tropical or subtropical waters. Relationships within the pod are very supportive – their members protect the calves, sick or injured animals. The communal “childcare” allows mothers to dive very deeply – to hunt, whereas the calves are consigned into care of other females. Calves are unable to dive so deeply because they have to swim to the surface more often to breath.<sup>141</sup>

The adult female bores a calf approximately once every five years. The newborn whale is one ton heavy and four metres long. The lactation of Sperm Whales lasts about two or three years. Males grow up to the age of thirty or forty years, the full size is reached in their 50s. They can live up to the long life of eighty years.<sup>142</sup>

Sperm Whales are perfect swimmers and the best divers in the world. They can dive up more to 1, 000 metres in depth to search for their main food, giant squids, octopuses and rays. One sperm whale can eat about one ton of fish and squids a day.

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<sup>140</sup> <<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/sperm-whale/>> 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>141</sup> <<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/sperm-whale/>> 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>142</sup> <<http://www.whale-images.com/info/sperm-whale-facts.htm>> 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011

For communication, Sperm Whales use the special sound system for communication and echolocation.<sup>143</sup>

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, sperm whales were hunted by whalers who wanted to gain valuable spermaceti and ambergris (a substance which can be found in the whale's stomach, usually around beaks of eaten squids), an expensive aromatic substance which is used in perfumery. As a result of whaling, the population of sperm whales decreased rapidly.<sup>144</sup>

### 5.1.2 Whales in Mythology

The white sperm whale, called Mocha Dick is said to have lived in the Pacific Ocean in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A newspaper article taken from *Knickerbocker*, or *New-York Monthly Magazine* in May 1838, refers about a white whale, called Mocha Dick. Mocha Dick was an enormous sperm whale, which had come off victorious in a hundred fights with whalers. The strange fact about this old bull whale was, that he was "white as wool".<sup>145</sup> Mocha Dick may have inspired Melville to create Moby Dick, the white leviathan.

Whales are sometimes called "leviathans" which was originally a name for the Biblical sea monster which was said to arise one day, devour the sun and throw the world into darkness. The Bible refers to leviathan in Job's Book which muses about the purpose of sorrow and suffering in the world. In part 3, Job execrated his day. Job 3:8 refers to a leviathan:

*"May those who curse days curse that day,  
Those who are ready to rouse Leviathan."*<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> <<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/sperm-whale/>> 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>144</sup> <<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/sperm-whale/>> 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>145</sup> <<http://mysite.du.edu/~tlyler/ploughboy/mochadick.htm>> 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>146</sup> <<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job+3&version=NIV>> 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011



A different Biblical story also concerns the image of a whale. It tells about Jonah, a prophet, who received God's message to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against the people who lived there, because they were wicked. But Jonah ran away and found the ship. He got on board and sailed away to flee from the Lord. God sent a strong storm on the sea which scared the sailors. They started to call for each own god. Only Jonah went below deck and fell asleep. The sailors came to him and told him to call for his god. They knew that he was running away from the Lord, he had told them so.<sup>147</sup> They were aware of fact that the storm is caused by Jonah's presence on the ship and decided to throw him into the sea. After they did so, the storm ended and sea grew calm. The end of this Biblical part says that:

*“Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.”*<sup>148</sup>

Jonah prayed every day inside the fish's belly and asked God to release him. Finally, God forgave Jonah his lapse and released him:

*“And the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.”*<sup>149</sup>

There is a parallel between the narrator of *Moby Dick*, Ishmael, and Jonah. Both of them escaped to the sea to avoid the dark side of human nature. Jonah disobeyed his Lord, because he was scared by the behaviour of the evil people in Nineveh. Ishmael avoided the spleen and suicidal thoughts which trapped him in his own destructivity. He also did not pay any attention to the warning sermon, specially served for whalers and their mourners. Then, Ishmael did not do anything to parry the inevitable catastrophe to which the chasing of the White Whale lead. Unexpectedly, the fate of both Jonah and Ishmael ended well, they survived the catastrophic situations. The fish finally threw Jonah onto dry land and Ishmael, as the only one, survived the sinking of the *Pequod*.

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<sup>147</sup> < <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job+3&version=NIV> > 16<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

The traditional Christianity understood the jaws of a whale as a gate to hell, Jonah's escape and rediscovery were interpreted as a symbolical resurrection and rebirth.<sup>150</sup>

On the contrary, some cultures have just an opposite opinion about whales, which are respected. There are legends about whales which lived in marine societies and behaved almost like humans in Oceania, along the Amazon, on the Northwest Coast of North America and in the Arctic. Local people called them "underwater people" who were treated equally to people.<sup>151</sup>

Whales are worshiped in parts of Japan, in Vietnam the "whale funerals" are carried out to prevent the killed whale to become a "hungry ghost", which could be dangerous for people. After a proper funeral, whales are believed to reborn as angels of the sea.<sup>152</sup>

The Alaska's Aleuts make special rituals devoted to whales before the whale hunting on which they are vitally dependent. Wives of hunters paint a sign of whale's tail on hunter's cheeks to bring them good luck.

Every year, the special ritual is carried out in a Japanese temple Koganji whose purpose is to cancel the curse that was imposed onto people for killing so many whales. This temple, which stands right at the sea, is consecrated to whales.<sup>153</sup>

Lots of interesting facts about whales (from the point of view of the 19<sup>th</sup> century observer) is also provided by the narrator of Melville's novel, *Moby Dick*. Three chapters are dedicated to depicting of whales. In the chapter called: *Of the Monstrous Pictures of Whales*, the narrator speaks of the oldest Hindoo, Egyptian and Grecian sculptures.

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<sup>150</sup> SAUNDERS, N. J. *Mytická síla zvířat*. Praha: Knížní Klub, 1996. p. 132

<sup>151</sup> KALLAND, A. *Unveiling the Whale: Discours on Whales and Whaling (Studies in Environmental Anthropology and Ethnobiology)*. United States: Bergham Books, 2009. p. 156

<sup>152</sup> Ibid. p. 156

<sup>153</sup> SAUNDERS, N. J. *Mytická síla zvířat*. Praha: Knížní Klub, 1996. p. 132

He also mentioned, for example, Indian wall paintings which depicted: “*the incarnation of Vishnu in the form of Leviathan, learnedly known as the Matse Avatar.*”<sup>154</sup> Then, the narrator criticized the depiction of the whale’s body which is absolutely untrue, according to his own experience and knowledge of whales.

The narrator, Ishmael, does not seem to interfere into the action of the novel. He gets on board, fulfils his tasks and just comments things which happen. His name, Ishmael, which is of the Biblical origin, shows us that he may be an outcast. (In the Bible, Ishmael is the son of Abraham, his mother – Hagar - is an Egyptian servant of Abraham’s wife, Sarah. An angel revealed to Hagar and said to her that she is pregnant with Ishmael, who will be a “wild man”.)<sup>155</sup>

Ishmael follows the temptation of the sea, saying he: “*would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation.*”<sup>156</sup> He signs on board of *Pequod*, a Nantucket whaler. The ship looked perfect, with the newest equipment for whaling. However, there was one thing which Ishmael did not count with. Later, he learned that the main reason why Captain Ahab set off to a voyage was not whaling as such, but revenge.

### 5.1.3 Moby Dick for Ahab and for Ishmael

Captain Ahab was obsessed by the wicked desire to kill the white whale, called Moby Dick, which once bit off one of his legs. Ahab’s fierce hunt for Moby Dick stays in opposition with Ishmael’s self-irony, which is at one time a narrative and a compositional strategy of the novel.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> MELVILLE, H. *Moby Dick*. London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994.p. 259

<sup>155</sup> BAYM, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Seventh Ed. Vol. B. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. p. 2321

<sup>156</sup> MELVILLE, H. *Moby Dick*. London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994.p. 21

<sup>157</sup> HRBATA, Z. PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy*. Praha: Karolinum, 2005. p. 134

For Ahab, nature is unreadable and unfathomable, hiding tremendous power. Nature signifies for him the edge of his limits and a serious barrier for him to expand himself into the world.<sup>158</sup> But the worst of every unpredictable freaks of nature was, for Ahab, the white whale: “*All evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick.*”<sup>159</sup> He wants to get it, no matter what the prize would be. He would use all possible means to reveal his target.

Ahab embodies the subjugating of wilderness by rough technology used by newcomers to America. Ahab’s aim, and also the symbolical aim of this technological power, is to liquidate the “dissimilarity” which is presented by Moby Dick and the whole ocean.<sup>160</sup>

Meanwhile for Ishmael, Moby Dick, is the phantom which belongs to the order of the ocean and nature. He calmly tells the facts and superstitions he heard about Moby Dick. This white whale is said to be extremely strong and smart at one time. It perhaps has an ability to think about the way of ridding of its pursuers. It can turn into an unexpected direction very quickly and stave the boats to splinters, or drive the boat back in consternation of their ship.

Its appearance also increases the horrific feeling of the sailors. Moby Dick has: “*a snow-white wrinkled forehead, and a high, pyramidal white hump*”<sup>161</sup> and a deformed lower jaw. The rest of the body is spotted and marbled, covered with several scars, the colour is not easy to be recognized.

Ishmael denies Moby Dick as being an animal of almost supernatural power, as it is said to be. Some sailors claim, he is ubiquitous, that he had been encountered in different latitudes at the same time. Some of them even think that Moby Dick is immortal – for it survived such brutal attacks and always escaped, leaving only wracks of ships. Ishmael’s opinion is that these superstitions are caused by the terrifying

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<sup>158</sup> HRBATA, Z. PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy*. Praha: Karolinum, 2005. p. 134

<sup>159</sup> MELVILLE, H. *Moby Dick*. London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994. p. 186

<sup>160</sup> HRBATA, Z. PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy*. Praha: Karolinum, 2005. p.134

<sup>161</sup> MELVILLE, H. *Moby Dick*. London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994. p. 184

appearance of the whale and ascribes Moby Dick's supernatural abilities to human's fantasy.

The narrator then speaks of Moby Dick's whiteness. He claims that white colour was usually perceived as a positive aspect, the feature of something with is extraordinarily beautiful and magical. He speaks of the white colour which is thought to possess some kind of virtue – white pearls, white marble. White animals also enhance beauty. White elephants were worshiped in India, beautiful white steeds used for kings and queens to ride, Jove incarnated into a white bull, the noble Iroquois have the sacred white dog, etc.

In connection with animals, the narrator points out that whiteness could evoke fear as well. Then, he continues with the examples of fearful creatures - a white polar bear of the poles or a white shark of the tropics. He also speaks of the white albatross:

*“Bethink thee of the albatross, whence come those clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread, in which that white phantom sails in all imaginations? Not Coleridge first threw that spell; but God's great, unflattering laureate, Nature.”*<sup>162</sup>

Whiteness, for Ishmael, is the absence of natural features, the feature that reminds us of eternity and is worrying at one time. He thinks of whiteness as of nonexistence of order within Nature.<sup>163</sup>

Finally, Captain Ahab encounters the White Whale and starts the wicked chase to kill Moby Dick. No matter how well prepared Ahab was, Moby Dick destroyed him and the whole crew, except Ishmael.

While the ship was sinking, the sky-hawk which followed the ship and used to sit near the ship's flag, intercepted its wing between the hammer and the wood. It was convinced to be whelmed by the blue depth, together with the ship:

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<sup>162</sup> MELVILLE, H. *Moby Dick*. London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994. p. 191

<sup>163</sup> HRBATA, Z. PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy*. Praha: Karolinum, 2005. p. 134

“And so the bird of heaven, with archangelic shrieks, and his imperial beak thrust upwards, and his whole captive form folded in the flag of Ahab, went down with his ship, which, like Satan, would not sink to hell till she had dragged a living part of heaven along with her, and helmeted herself with it.”<sup>164</sup>

The fate of the ship was fulfilled, as the infinite depth of the ocean whelmed her forever. The ship vanished but the ocean was still there, without any change:

“... then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago.”<sup>165</sup>

## 5.2 The Whale in Moby Dick and the Albatross in the Rime of the Ancient Mariner

The devastation of the ship and the curse which is imposed upon the crew is a very similar theme as in Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. There is a motive of punishment which is sent upon people who sinned against the general order and rules.

The mariner killed a white albatross which led the ship to the warm, pleasant waters. He did it unexpectedly, unreasonably as a result of his momentary wicked mood. The punishment came immediately, the crew was examined by various kinds of suffering. However, the mariner got the chance to avert the tragedy of his ship. At the moment he changed his view of the sea creatures which crawled beyond in the greenish water and blessed them, the curse was broken. The crew of his ship arose from death and the ship landed safely.

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<sup>164</sup> MELVILLE, H. *Moby Dick*. London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994. p. 535

<sup>165</sup> MELVILLE, H. *Moby Dick*. London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994.p. 535

In *Moby Dick*, the catastrophe was avoidable by no means. From the beginning, the voyage was intended as revenge. Captain Ahab was full of hate which drove him into a tragedy. He wanted to kill the powerful “king of the Ocean”, white Moby Dick, as the bitten leg was not a sufficient warning for him. The evil and hate inside him was inexorable and prepared for him the inevitable end. Perhaps, it was the unwritten universal law which says that revenge does not pay.

## 6 Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe is known for his distinctive style of writing, usage of frenetic features and creating of new literary forms. He is sometimes called “the father of detective story”. Poe’s short stories of terror and supernatural agency, such as *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Pit and the Pendulum* or *The Premature Burial* presented a new literary style. Poe excelled in writing romantic and narrative poetry, burlesques, hoaxes and literary criticism.

Poe’s parents died early and Edgar was brought up by the Allans, who treated him as their own son. Later, hostilities between Edgar and his step father, John Allan, appeared. Therefore, Mr. Allan refused to continue with the financial support of young Edgar. He provided Edgar only minimum money for studying at the University of Virginia. Poe was a successful student who wrote poetry on the side, but he made debt and began to drink and finally had to leave the university.<sup>166</sup>

Poe worked as a literary critic and editor of various magazines, unfortunately his career was influenced by his excessive drinking. He lived in poverty, with his aunt and her daughter, Virginia, who he finally married. (Virginia was only thirteen at the time of their wedding). The 1830s were the most successful years in Poe’s writing of short stories.

In 1843 he won a prize in writing contest by the Philadelphia Dollar Newspaper which was for him a literary breakthrough.<sup>167</sup> However, Poe’s most successful year was 1845, the year of publishing of *The Raven*.

Temperamental Poe was a celebrity of literary parties, attractive for women, whose interest he did not left unnoticed. He only limited his flirtations before his

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<sup>166</sup> BAYM, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Seventh Ed. Vol. B. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. p. 1528

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1530



young wife's death. Virginia did not even reach the age of twenty when she died from tuberculosis in 1847.<sup>168</sup>

Poe died at the age of forty, in 1849. He was found senseless in streets of Baltimore and later he died in a hospital. As the cause of death "the congestion of the brain" was mentioned, although there are still unclear facts about it.

Quarrelsome, unreliable and alcoholic Poe made only a few friends but lots of enemies. After Poe's death, Rufus Griswold, his supposed friend, to whom Poe entrusted all his literary works, began a "campaign" of spoiling Poe's posthumous reputation. Griswold wrote a vicious obituary and rewrote Poe's correspondence. Surprisingly, his motive of such revenge was never enlightened.<sup>169</sup>

Poe gained his international fame by his mysterious short stories and poems. His unique style inspired many poets of the era, e.g. T. S. Eliot or William Faulkner. In Europe, Charles Baudelaire was the enthusiastic translator of Poe's works and drew inspirations from them as well. In the context of Czech Romanticism, he influenced works of J. Arbes and J. Zeyer. The first translations of Poe's stories and poems were done within Czech literary circles yet during the 1850s.<sup>170</sup>

In his works, Poe used features of Gothic genre, gloomy plots usually set into old, dark, gloomy buildings. He dealt with such topic as death, insanity and decay. His heroes were often aristocratic madmen, self-tormented murderers, neurasthenic necrophiliacs, and other deviant types, who heightened the horrific effects.<sup>171</sup> There was a constant dissolution of rationality in Poe's works. The decay of the rationally defined process is omnipresent. Irrational power of decay was not expected neither by rationalism, religion, nor the common sense.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> The same, p. 1531

<sup>169</sup> BAYM, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Seventh Ed. Vol. B. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. p. 1528

<sup>170</sup> < <http://cl.ff.cuni.cz/st/sylab.php?a=1168> > 17<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>171</sup> BAYM, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Seventh Ed. Vol. B. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. p. 1531

<sup>172</sup> HRBATA, Z. PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy*. Praha: Karolinum, 2005. p. 151

The main aim, for Poe, is to shock the reader. Poe plays a witty game with the reader, he understands this game in a romantic way, as a free play of imagination. At first, there is always a purpose to shock the reader, to confuse his expectation and finally to reveal it in an unexpected explanation.<sup>173</sup>

His works are fairly short because Poe claims that both the poems and tales should be short. The best effect is, according to him, achieved when the text is read at one sitting. Otherwise, the unity of effect would be dissipated.<sup>174</sup>

Some of Poe's texts were written with the purpose of being well-sold article. This was not the case of poetry. For Poe, poetry was a passion and he always put his highest stock in his poems.<sup>175</sup>

## 6.1. The Raven

The famous poem by Edgar Allan Poe which deals with a mysterious night visit, written in 1845, opens with a well known stanza:

*“Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,  
Over many a quaint a curious volume of forgotten lore –  
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping, ...”*<sup>176</sup>

The lyrical subject is a young man who nearly slumbered in the silence of his well furnished chamber. He reminded it was a “bleak December”, embers in the fire-place faded and the young man was languished by the memory of a dead beauty, called Lenore. Then, the tapping interrupted his gloomy musing.

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<sup>173</sup> HRBATA, Z. PROCHÁZKA, M. *Romantismus a romantismy*. Praha: Karolinum, 2005. p. 152, 153

<sup>174</sup> BAYM, S. (eds.) *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*. Seventh Ed. Vol. B. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007. p. 1531

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid* p. 1532

<sup>176</sup> POE, E. A. *Complete Tales and Poems*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975. p. 943

Curtains gave a soft swish. The man suddenly went worried, there was something about to come, something supernatural and fearful. Who would come in such an hour? He tried to persuade himself logically that it would be an ordinary visit. But fear took power over his mind, senses and rationality did not work. Nevertheless, he decided to open the door and there was – nothing, just darkness.

He came back into the room, persuading himself that the sound was made by the window. He opened it energetically and:

*“with many a flirt and flutter,*

*In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly days of yore.”<sup>177</sup>*

A pair of black wings whirled the air into the chamber, as the bird flew in, and confidently walked through the room and perched on the bust of Pallas Athena which hung upon the chamber door. The whiteness of marble of the bust contrasted strongly with the blackness of the bird, it was a Raven. The lyrical subject addresses him, calling him *“ancient Raven from the Nightly shore”*. He asks the Raven about his name on the *“Night’s Plutonian shore”* and the Raven quoted: *“Nevermore.”<sup>178</sup>*

“Plutonian shore” is a strange term, referring to some unknown and dark place. Pluto was the god of the underworld, also known as Hades, who ruled the posthumous world of dead souls. Modern reader immediately thinks of the smallest planet in our Solar system. Pluto was discovered in 1930 therefore Poe obviously could not know it. Even though, there is an interesting reference because Pluto stayed as a member of our Solar system for nearly thirty years. In 2006, when the International Astronomical Union defined what the “planet” is, Pluto was excluded from our Solar system. Metaphorically, it was taken away from the Sun, to the shade, as the king of the underworld.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> POE, E. A. *Complete Tales and Poems*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975. p. 944

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 944

<sup>179</sup> <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pluto>> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

The lyrical subject then sat opposite to the bird and watching him, the pervasive memory of Lenore arouse again. The name Lenore has Greek origin and means “light” or “sun ray”.<sup>180</sup> Her name painfully shined through the darkened mind of the young man. Its lightness contrasted with the ebony black colour of the bird, sitting in front of him. The ironical derision of the Raven’s quoting “*nevermore*” nearly makes the man mad. Terror heightened in each following stanza, the lyrical subject then ordered the Raven out of his house, back to where it belongs:

*“Be that word our sign of parting, bird or friend!” I shrieked, upstarting –  
“Get thee back into the tempest and the Night’s Plutonian shore!  
... Take thy beak from my heart, and take thy form from off my door!”*

*Quoth the Raven, “Nevermore.”*<sup>181</sup>

However, the bird did not intend to leave, he still remained on the bust of Pallas, watching the terrified young man with his glowing bird’s eyes. The lyrical subject is paralysed by horror, unable to release himself from this supernatural captivity. It seemed that it would have had the non-reversible consequences on man’s mental health:

*“And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon’s that is dreaming,  
And the lamp-light o’er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;  
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor  
Shall be lifted – nevermore!”*<sup>182</sup>

Here, the poem ended. It left the reader within horror which is experienced through the lyrical subject. The Raven still occupied the room, remaining on the Pallas bust, scaring the young man to madness.

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<sup>180</sup> <<http://www.meaning-of-names.com/greek-names/lenore.asp>> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>181</sup> POE, E. A. *Complete Tales and Poems*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975. p.945

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 946

### 6.1.1 The Common Raven

The demonical visitor of Poe's poem, the Raven, is probably the Common Raven (*Corvus Corax*), sometimes called the Northern Raven. Ravens are largest passerine birds in North America and most of European countries. These big birds occupy the whole Northern hemisphere, Europe, Asia, North Africa and North America. There are about eight subspecies of ravens which vary a little in appearance.<sup>183</sup>

Common Raven is one of two largest corvids (together with the Thick-billed Raven), it reaches the size of 61 – 66 cm, with large wingspan from one metre to one and half metre. Comparing to other birds, ravens are very heavy, the approximate weight is about 1,3 kg.<sup>184</sup>

These birds are very adaptive, not choosy about food, omnivorous. Ravens eat a wide range of foodstuffs, including insects, small rodents and birds, cereal grains or fruit. They sometimes eat human garbage when anything better is not available.<sup>185</sup>

They prefer living in couples or in small groups, only in winter they gather in flocks. It is said that ravens mate for life. Raven's mating rituals are rather remarkable, males do elaborate dances which include chases, dives and rolls. Although merely known, ravens are excellent fliers which can proudly compete with falcons or hawks. After the couple is created, they build a nest, usually in a large tree or on a cliff ledge. Both parents provide perfect care to their chicks.<sup>186</sup> The Czech saying which relates to careless and cruel parents: "To be a raven's mother/father" seems to be truly unsubstantiated.

Ravens are very intelligent birds which can mime sounds from their environment. Apart from their typical croaking, they can learn to imitate other sounds,

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<sup>183</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corvus\\_corax](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corvus_corax)> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>184</sup> <<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/raven/>> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>185</sup> <[http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krkavec\\_velk%C3%BD](http://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krkavec_velk%C3%BD)> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>186</sup> <<http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/birds/raven/>> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

including human speech. They have a system of sounds which they use for social interaction. These sounds differ, according to purpose for which they are produced, such as alarm calls, chase calls or flight calls. Ravens use non-vocalic means of communication as well, such as wing whistles, clapping and clicking.<sup>187</sup>

Common Ravens life lasts approximately from ten to fifteen years, although ravens can live much longer in captivity – even about forty years. The case of the home-bred raven which lived until the age of sixty-nine is known.<sup>188</sup>

### 6.1.2 Ravens in Mythology

The conception of ravens rather differs, by some people, ravens are considered as pests and are shot in large numbers, for others, ravens are magical and wise birds which carry deep symbolism. Ravens are the birds of paradox.

There are two main symbolical aspects of ravens. Raven as a creator and raven as a trickster. The “world-creation” raven symbolism appears in many cultures, especially in Native Americans’ legends. One of these legends tells about a new born boy, describes his adolescence and love adventure of seducing the daughter of the Sky Chief. To revenge, Sky Chief sent a flood on Earth. To escape the flood, the boy changed into raven and flew to the heavens. The Sky Daughter and the boy had a child who fell to earth in the form of Raven. When Raven grew up, he transformed Earth from the dark, dry place to a fertile land full of forests, rivers and mountain and first people and animals appeared on the land.<sup>189</sup>

In Native American mythology, the Raven is the one who brought light into this world. Legends say that the Sky Chief hid the sun in his kingdom, so permanent

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<sup>187</sup>< [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corvus\\_corax](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corvus_corax)> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>188</sup><<http://www.birdlife.cz/index.php?ID=183>> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>189</sup> MARTIN, L. C. *The Folklore of Birds*. Old Seybrook: The Globe Pequod Press, 1993. p. 157

darkness shrouded Earth. The Raven decided to get the sun back. By a trick he got into the body of the Sky daughter and then appeared as her baby. As a “Sky baby” he was close to the sun and one day he changed back to the Raven, caught the sun and brought it back upon Earth. Therefore, ravens remain for Native Americans connected with the symbol of light and life cycle.<sup>190</sup>

Ravens could have lived on Earth hundreds or thousands years before people, along with wolves. Wolf packs provided them a perpetual source of food, because they could scavenge on carrions left by wolves. That is why ravens are sometimes depicted together with wolves. Afterwards, new and probably the strongest predators, humans, appeared. Ravens did not fail to exploit the advantage to feast on the carrions which remained after hunting.<sup>191</sup>

The raven’s cult has firm roots in Norse mythology, in which ravens are connected with Odin, the ruler of Norse gods, who is sometimes called the Raven god. Odin is often depicted with wolves and ravens which accompanied him into battle or hunt.<sup>192</sup> The two Odin’s ravens are called Huginn and Muninn which means “Thought” and “Memory”. They sat on Odin’s shoulders and helped him to see and hear everything.<sup>193</sup>

In some cultures, ravens and crows are said to be originally white. According to a Greek legend, Coronis, the daughter of Phlegyes, was pregnant with Apollo’s baby. Apollo left a white raven to watch her. Later, just before the birth, Coronis decided to marry another man, Ischys. The raven went to Apollo and told him the news. Apollo got furious and killed Coronis and Ischys. The raven was punished as a bearer of bad news by turning its white colour into black. The unborn child was retrieved by Apollo and became Aesclepius, the father of medicine.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> MARTIN, L. C. *The Folklore of Birds*. Old Seybrook: The Globe Pequod Press, 1993. p. 158

<sup>191</sup> BERND, H. *Mind of the Raven: Investigation and Adventures with Wolf-Birds*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999. p. 242,243

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 243

<sup>193</sup> <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural\\_depictions\\_of\\_ravens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_depictions_of_ravens) > 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>194</sup> <<http://www.ravenfamily.org/nascakiyetl/obs/rav1.html> > 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

Sometimes, ravens are mistaken with rooks or crows. However, rooks and crows are said to be raven's smaller "cousins". Ravens are considered powerful birds, which are able to do almost everything. Rooks and crows are thought to have much more merciful and fair character.<sup>195</sup>

In ancient Europe, ravens were considered mystical and magical birds, sometimes connected with wizards and witches. Two ravens which were sent from heaven are said to guide Alexander the Great across the desert.

The Bible refers to ravens in some parts of the Old Testament. Song of Solomon 5 which refers to Solomon, describes him (5:11):

*"His head is purest gold;  
His hair is wavy  
And black as a raven."*<sup>196</sup>

Some legends about King Arthur say that Arthur changed after his death into the raven or that he did not die at all, and transformed himself into this black magical creature.<sup>197</sup>

Ravens also play a remarkable role in history of England. Her Majesty's place and fortress, the Tower of London is firmly connected with existence of ravens. A flock of ravens has occupied the Tower of London for ages. According to the legend, at least six ravens have to remain in the Tower of London. If they leave, both the Tower and Monarchy would fall.<sup>198</sup>

In modern culture, ravens are often considered as birds of ill-omen and death. It is partly raven's black colour which evokes sorrow and evil. Mainly, the connection

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<sup>195</sup> <<http://www.ravenfamily.org/nascakiyetl/obs/rav1.html>> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>196</sup> <<http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Song%20of%20Solomon%205&version=NIV>> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>197</sup> <<http://www.ravenfamily.org/nascakiyetl/obs/rav1.html>> 18<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>198</sup> <<http://www.historic-uk.com/DestinationsUK/TowerRavens.htm>> 17<sup>th</sup> April 2011



with death is caused by the occurrence of ravens in the battle fields where they fed on corpses of dead soldiers. Therefore, ravens are associated with death and decay.

## 6.2 Poe's Raven

In Poe's poem, the Raven is an ill-omen, source of terror. Poe may have chosen the Raven as a symbol of some unpredictable, dark, devilish power. (The choice of the bird kind was essential, just imagine another black bird kind, e.g. a blackbird sitting on the bust of Pallas.) The dreary bird, gloomy setting and musicality of the precise rhyme, is spectacular. The sonorous refrain: "*Nevermore*", which was conscientiously chosen, (as Poe describes in his "*Philosophy of Composition*") protracts emphasis, and resembles the Raven's croaking, admitting no doubt about the seriousness of the situation.

Poe used his favourite theme, which he considered the most poetical, death of a young beautiful woman. The combination of beauty and fragility, accomplished by, according to Poe: "*...its highest manifestation - tone of sadness*"<sup>199</sup>, is impressive. The author considered melancholy as the "*most legitimate of all the poetical tones*" and he wanted to "*excite the sensitive souls to tears.*"

"*The Raven*" was introduced into Czech literary circles in 1850s and the first translations appeared few years later. The first interpreter of "*The Raven*" translated

the bird kind used by Poe as "Havran". However, it was rather misinterpreted because "the raven", means in Czech "krkavec", not "havran". Havran (*Corvus frugilensis*), whose equivalent in English is "the rook", belong also to *Corvidae* family but is much smaller, soft-hearted and harmless bird.<sup>200</sup> The misinterpretation was, astonishingly, repeated by following fifteen translators, without being noticed or changed.

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<sup>199</sup> <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/poe/composition.html>> 17<sup>th</sup> April 2011

<sup>200</sup> "A Biological Note" by Czech prominent biologist, Karel Samšínák, to translation of "The Raven" by Miroslav Macek (1993)

## 7 Conclusion

My thesis concentrates on the five Romantic authors and analyzes the symbolism of the used animal images. Mostly, the animals which appear in the works of these authors are birds.

Birds which possess the ability to fly and thus they are not limited by any rules and are endlessly free. Maybe, the birds were so favoured by the English Romantics, as symbols of liberty and no limits.

The second chapter, which deals with the works of S. T. Coleridge, concerns his so called “*Conversational Poems*” (*The Eolian Harp*, *Frost at Midnight* and *The Nightingale*) and then two of his famous “*Mystery Poems*”, the magical *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and gothic demonical *Christabel*. In these poems, Coleridge used mainly the bird images, although strong symbolism of the snake and other animal kinds is used in *Christabel*.

The next part (Chapter 3) concerns the second main member of “The Lake School”, W. Wordsworth. Birds can also be found most often in his works, although Wordsworth used different kinds of birds than Coleridge, such as sparrows or skylarks.

The fourth part, dedicated to G.G., Lord Byron and his *Prisoner of Chillon* and *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage – Canto III* mostly refers to the birds of prey. Byron sometimes used the images of the birds in a paradoxical way, e.g. the image of the captured bird, or the bird unable to fly. The next animal image, of the mythological “water steeds”, also appeared in *Canto III*.

Parts 5 and 6 refer to the American Romantics, H. Melville and E. A. Poe. I dealt with the symbolism of the white whale in Melville’s novel *Moby Dick*, the phantom of the ocean, which represented human destructivity and obsession.

The work closes with the final thematic part concerning E. A. Poe, where the theme returns back to the birds. The black ominous bird, the raven, similarly “dark” as the author of the poem, brings the horrific effect of Poe’s imagination.

It is an interesting fact that the selection of the bird images quite corresponds with characters of the author's works and their life attitudes:

The magnificent poetry of Coleridge could be represented by the high flying albatross, the messenger which almost touches the stars. Wordsworth may be likened to a skylark, an unobtrusive bird, which enthusiastically soars to the skies and then humbly returns to Earth.

Then, ardent Byron could be represented by the noble bird of prey which is beautiful and fierce at one time. Finally, debauched Poe, who brought the terrifying themes into literary fiction, could perfectly resemble of the black raven.

The only part, in which the image of the bird is not essential is that of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. However, *Moby Dick* is a strong animal symbol and the water element complements the airy birds in an interesting way. Moreover, there is a similar theme of killing of the white animal and consequent punishment between *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Moby Dick*.

The bird images which, according to my literary observation, appear in the works of these Romantic authors most often, comparing to other animal images, could be taken as the solitary object of the literary analysis. Such analysis focused only on the bird kinds would allow the author to go more deeply into the theme.

In each part of my thesis, I tried to analyze the animal symbols in the chosen works. I examined the concrete animal kinds in terms of mythology and symbolism, adding some biological facts and interests.

## 8 Resumé

Úkolem mojí diplomové práce bylo analyzovat zvířecí obrazy v dílech anglických a amerických romantických autorů z pohledu jejich symboliky a mytologie.

Před zahájením samotné práce bylo nezbytné omezit okruh vybraných autorů, kvůli rozsahu a soudržnosti tematiky, který dosáhl finálního složení – Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, George Gordon, Lord Byron, Herman Melville a Edgar Allan Poe.

Poté následovalo nastudování primární literatury vybraných autorů, ze kterých jsem vybírala díla obsahující zvířecí obrazy. Souběžně bylo nutné zabývat se literaturou sekundární, díly pojednávajícími o britském a americkém romantismu, romantických autorech a knihami o mytologii. Soustředila jsem se také na vyhledávání webových zdrojů, abych propojila tradiční zdroje s aktuálními informacemi.

Samotnou práci jsem rozdělila na pět hlavních tematických oddílů, podle autorů. Hlavní kapitoly jsem dále dělila na podkapitoly týkající se jednotlivých děl, případně symbolik jednotlivých zvířat.

První kapitola zkoumá obsazení zvířat v dílech S. T. Coleridge, v jeho „konverzačních básních“ (např. *Frost at Midnight*) a tzv. „básních mysteria“ *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* a *Christabel*.

Další kapitola pojednává o W. Wordsworthovi, věnuje se jeho dílům oslavujícím přírodu. V jeho básních se objevují všední ptáci, jako jsou vrabci a skřiváci.

Třetí část se věnuje roli zvířat v dílech Lorda Byrona. Byron používá také převážně ptačí symboly, v jeho případě ale jde o majestátné dravce.

Dále navazují autoři amerického romantismu, H. Melvill a E. A. Poe. Dílo H. Melvilla, *Bílá Velryba*, které jsem se rozhodla zkoumat, vybočuje svojí symbolikou z převažující ptačí říše. Avšak mocný symbol bílé velryby a vodního

elementu tohoto díla doplňuje zajímavým způsobem převažující „vzdušný“ prvek ostatních autorů.

Navíc ve své práci poukazují na spojitost mezi tematikou *Bílé velryby* a Coleridgeovým *Rýmem starého námořníka*, kterou je motiv trestu za zabití (nebo vytrvalé touze po pomstě) bílého zvířete a bělost hlavních „zvířecích elementů“ v dílech obsazených.

Poslední tematický celek uzavírající moji práci je *Havran* E. A. Poea, temná báseň, která navrácí zpět zkoumání symboliky zvířat do ptačí říše.

Konkrétní zvířecí druhy jsem se snažila analyzovat z pohledu jejich role v díle a dále ho usouvztažnit s mytologií, legendami a symbolikou, které se k němu váží. U většiny zkoumaných zvířat jsem také přidávala biologické informace a jiné zajímavosti.

Výsledkem mojí práce bylo zjištění, že zdaleka nejčastější zvířecí druh vyskytující se v pracích Coleridge, Wordswortha a Byrona, jsou ptáci. Ptáci možná pro jejich spojitost se svobodou, která byla pro romantiky jednou ze základních hodnot.

Zajímavé také je, že použité ptačí druhy a jejich symbolika se zvláště shodují s postavami autorů děl, či s jakousi esencí, která vyvěrá z jejich literární tvorby.

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