The Ancyent Marinere reflecting Fears of Disease in the Age of Sail

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Abstract

This article investigates the horrific aspects of diseases and epidemics, dangers that were present on sea voyages during the Age of Sail, and analyses how they are reflected in Ghost Ship tales, especially in the *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834). This ballad incorporates almost all calamities that could befall seafarers and examines such dangers as diseases as well as their causes. The focus of this study is to investigate in what way diseases on ships were feared during the Age of Sail and how those fears were reflected in ghost ship narratives.

1. Introduction

"I fear thee, ancyent Marinere!
I fear thy skinny hand;
And thou art long and lank and brown
As is the ribb'd Sea-sand."[1]

Going to sea was a frightening endeavour during the Age of Sail. Dependent on wind and weather, insecure of ever returning again, cut off from all communication during the often long journey and all the time caught in too small a vessel with too many other people; the idea of going to sea did not inspire confidence. It was accompanied by fears and anxieties.[2]

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[1] Samuel Taylor COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere. In seven Parts, in: William Wordsworth / Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lyrical Ballads. With a few other Poems, London 1798, digitally available under: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Lyrical_Ballads_(1798)/The_Rime_of_the_Ancyent_Marinere (09.11.2020), 1–52, here 21.

[2] See Jane LYDON, Visions of Disaster in the Unlucky Voyage of the Ship Batavia 1647, in: Itinerario 42/3 (2018), digitally available under: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/itinerario/article/visions-of-disaster-in-the-unlucky-voyage-of-the-ship-batavia-1647/A34610029BD3D41FE0656A0311F12E60 (19.04.2021), 351–374, here 355; Julia Mix BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark. The Chronotope of the Ghost Ship in the Atlantic World, in: Gothic Studies 19/2 (2017), digitally available under: http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&sid=81da7242-6df7-43fc-a317-0a6f8c474aeb%40sdc-v-sessmgr02 (08.11.2020), 58–70, here 59, 62, 68 f; Dieter RICHTER, Seeseiten. Die Literatur und das Meer, in: Dorlis Blume et al., ed., Europa und das Meer. Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums 13.06.2018 bis 06.01.2019, Berlin 2018, 166–174, here 170; Nora ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew". Gespenstige Schiffe und ruheloses Schreiben bei Samuel Taylor Coleridge und Arthur Rimbaud, in: Arcadia 51/2 (2016), digitally available under: https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/arca/51/2/article-p325.xml (08.11.2020), 325–343, here 325 f.

Diseases and epidemics were among the main dangers that could befall a ship at sea, and, therefore, were a core aspect which contributed to sailors' anxieties.[3] With advancing Globalisation during the Age of Sail, shipping routes became longer and were frequented more regularly than before. Not only goods and knowledge made their way through all continents, but diseases as well. They took their toll on the native communities of the Americas, South Africa, Australia, and the Pacific islands, who lost up to 95 per cent of their populations to new diseases.[4] However, Europeans were also affected severely by diseases and epidemics, and the living conditions on board of ships provided a perfect environment for their spread.[5]

Ghost ship stories reflect this frightening facet of going to sea. It is the particular aim of this paper to shed light on the anxieties caused by diseases and epidemics and their reflection in ghost ship narratives, especially in the ballad *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834), a flagship ghost ship story and one of the first of its kind, which has come down to us in literature.

A connection between fears and disease was already theorized by contemporaries of the Age of Sail: Bernardino Ramazzini (1633–1714), an Italian doctor, wrote in 1700 that fear itself could make people at sea ill.[6]

> "It often happens that ships are attacked by some epidemical disease which either arrives from without or is the result of the ordinary unwholesome diet and especially of water that has gone bad; or it may arise from the presence aboard of a great crowd of seafarers of various and diverse sorts, landlubbers who have entrusted themselves to the deep and are kept in such terror by violent storms that they have contracted malignant and pestilential fevers; then the seed of contagion spreads abroad, and the rest fall victims to the same disease. […] And they have to look on while men die at their side, nor can they help seeing before their eyes the watery grave that all will share. In this case the wise man´s only

[3] See LYDON, Visions of Disaster, 355; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 59, 62, 68 f.; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 325 f., 339.
[4] See Jared DIAMOND / Claire PANOSIAN, Continental Asymmetry of the Origins of Human Infectious Diseases, in: Pekka Hämäläinen, ed., When Disease makes History. Epidemics and Great Historical Turning Points, Helsinki 2006, 17–44, here 24; Jörg VÖGELE / Ulrich KOPPITZ / Hideharu UMEHARA, Epidemien und Pandemien in historischer Perspektive, in: Jörg Vögele / Stefanie Knöll / Thorsten Noack, ed., Epidemien und Pandemien in historischer Perspektive. Epidemics and Pandemics in Historical Perspective, Wiesbaden 2016, digitally available under: https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-658-13875-2 (27.05.2021), 3–31, here 21 f.; Sheldon WATTS, Epidemics and History. Disease, Power and Imperialism, New Haven / London 1997, 84.
[5] See Edwin GUILLET, The Great Migration. The Atlantic Crossing by Sailing-Ship 1770–1860, 2nd edition, Toronto 1963, digitally available under: https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.3138/9781487596262/html (28.05.2021), 89; Eberhard SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer 2. Seeleute und Leben an Bord im Ersten Kolonialzeitalter (15. bis 18. Jahrhundert), Wiesbaden 2008, 253.
[6] See Bernardino RAMAZZINI, Diseases of Workers. Translated from the Latin Text De Morbis Artificum of 1713 by Wilmer Cave Wright, New York / London 1964, digitally available under: https://archive.org/details/diseasesofworker00rama/page/n5/mode/2up?q=459 (28.05.2021); 465; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 300 f.

> course is to entrust the whole matter of his safety not to fate but to the Judge of all things."[7]

The overcrowding on board, the insufficient diet, an unsuitable crew and even terror of storms could be a cause of illness, according to Ramazzini. Finally, the doctor himself states that at facing the prospect of such a death, only God could help them.[8] He thus addresses three central issues of interest in this context: the dangers ships would face on the sea, the way provisions and living conditions affected the health of sailors and the fear that a plague ship, struck by an epidemic, imposed on other ships and ports. Another section of the article will cover how people dealt with death on sea and what a central role religion played for sailors. All those topics can be found in Coleridge's ballad as well.

To analyse fears, I use a psychoanalytical theory developed by Fritz Riemann in his work *The Four Forms of Anxiety*[9]. My approach is to examine in what way those four forms of anxiety are reflected in the *Rime*. As a field of research, emotions such as fear pose a few methodical problems, however.[10]

Defining what emotions are is in itself problematic. Historians rely on definitions developed by psychologists and biologists, who themselves have very divided opinions on what emotions really are, each school providing a different model for categorisation and explanation of the emotion. How can historians choose from such a diverse and even contradicting collection of explanations?[11] Regularly, a distinction between fear and anxiety is drawn:

> "The word 'fear' is used to refer to an immediate, objective threat while anxiety refers to an anticipated, subjective threat. Anxiety is described as a more generalized state while fear is more specific and immediate."[12]

[7] RAMAZZINI, Diseases of Workers, 465.
[8] See ibid, 465.
[9] See Fritz RIEMANN, Grundformen der Angst. Eine tiefenpsychologische Studie, new edition, München / Basel 1994.
[10] See Joanna BOURKE, Fear and Anxiety. Writing about Emotion in Modern History, in: History Workshop Journal, 55/1 (2003), digitally available under: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4289830 (28.05.2021), 111–133, here 113 f.; John MARINCOLA, Beyond Pity and Fear. The Emotions of History, in: Ancient Society 33 (2003), digitally available under: https://www.jstor.org/stable/44079841 (28.05.2021), 285–315, here 285.
[11] See BOURKE, Fear and Anxiety, 112–116; Barbara ROSENWEIN, Generations of Feeling. A History of Emotions, 600–1700, Cambridge 2016, digitally available under: https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/generations-of-feeling/7FF0278BEF2BC335267870F6FEB88E3F (20.04.2021), 1 f.; Max WEISS, Introduction. Fear and Its Opposites in the History of Emotions, in: Michael Laffan / Max Weiss, ed., Facing Fear. The History of an Emotion in Global Perspective, digitally available under: https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/9781400845248/html (27.05.2021), 1–9, here 2.
[12] BOURKE, Fear and Anxiety, 126.

However, it is hard to support that distinction in the case of this paper because the analysed early modern sources do not themselves make a distinction between anxiety and fear; they use the words as if they were interchangeable. In the *Rime*, for example, the word "fear" appears in in the context of an unclear, diffuse threat:

Like one, that on a lonely road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turn'd round, walks on
And turns no more his head:
Because he knows, a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.[13]

Therefore, the terms fear and anxiety are not explicitly separated in this paper, but attention will be paid to when and how the words are used in the sources.

In order to examine cases of disease on board of ships during the Age of Sail, I rely on various studies and publications on the history of medicine, a field thoroughly researched. A number of publications, including the article by Mark Staniforth *Diet, Disease and Death at Sea on the Voyage to Australia*[14] and the commented source collection *Indienfahrer 2. Seeleute und Leben an Bord im Ersten Kolonialzeitalter* by Eberhard Schmitt,[15] provide comprehensible research connecting living conditions on board of ships to outbreaks of diseases and attempts at their prevention.[16] Karl Heinz Regers´ monograph *Dann sprang er über Bord. Alltagspsychologie und psychische Erkrankung an Bord britischer Schiffe im 19. Jahrhundert* is the first work with a historical approach to provide a perspective of psychological illness on board.[17] It includes examinations regarding the emotional condition of seafarers, fear being prominent.

Historians of literature have taken an interest in ghost ship narratives, and these fictional tales and myths found their way into some historians' works as well.[18] However, real

[13] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 38.
[14] See Mark STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death at Sea on the Voyage to Australia. 1837–1839, in: International Journal of Maritime History 12/8 (1996), digitally available under: http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=3692c435-25b4-4869-992e-8b8ed1a6685c%40sessionmgr102 (12.04.2021), 119–156.
[15] See SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer.
[16] See STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death.
[17] See Karl-Heinz REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord". Alltagspsychologie und psychische Erkrankung an Bord britischer Schiffe im 19. Jahrhundert, Göttingen / Bristol 2014; Thomas BEDDIES, Rezension. Karl-Heinz Reger, »Dann sprang er über Bord«. Alltagspsychologie und psychische Erkrankung an Bord britischer Schiffe im 19. Jahrhundert, in: Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift 75/1 (2016), digitally available under: https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/mgzs/75/1/article-p232.xml (09.11.2020), 232–235, here 232.
[18] See Agnes ANDEWEG, Manifestations of the Flying Dutchman. On Materializing Ghosts and (Not) Remembering the Colonial Past, in: Cultural History 4/2 (2015), digitally available under: http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/de-

occurrences of ghost ships (when a ship was emptied by all crew as a result of an accident or epidemic) seem to have completely evaded historical research so far, whilst non-academic publications leap at the topic, as the tale of the ship *Mary Celeste* shows. Several books have been published speculating on the tragic disappearance of all its crew in 1872, when the ship was found empty.[19] There must be more examples of such real "ghost ships" – hitherto, no historian has dedicated focused attention to them.

This paper aspires to combine the well-founded knowledge of Medical History with methods of Emotional History and the discoveries of the History of Literature, to analyse the interrelation of epidemics, anxieties and ghost ship stories.

2. *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*

Myths are generally seen to represent and construct cultural memory. That way, they influence people´s understanding of history.[20] No information given in the ballad can thus be regarded as historically accurate material. Nevertheless, I go with Emily Alder in expecting some experience of sailors and their voyages reflected in the stories – and these are exactly the elements I want to isolate and analyse. This can be done by means of comparison with the more informative historical sources, such as travel journals or medical records.[21]

Furthermore, literary sources provide something that is found lacking in many other sources: subjective reflection. The written narratives of ghost ships developed at the beginning of the 19th century, four hundred years after Europeans had first started their adventurous seafaring journeys which sparked the process of Globalisation. Global routes and organisational structures were safely established by the time these stories were written. Ghost ship narratives are partly a representation of romantic enthusiasm for the lost past and partly a result of reflection on the dangers at sea and the fears posed by those dangers.[22]

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[19] See Olaf FRITSCHE, Gibt es Geisterschiffe wirklich? Die Wahrheit hinter den Meeres-Mythen, Reinbeck/Hamburg 2018; Rupert FURNEAUX, Das Geheimnis der „Mary Celeste", Stuttgart 1967; Eigel WIESE, Legendäre Schiffswracks. Von der Arche Noah bis zur Titanic, Hamburg 2015.

[20] See ANDEWEG, Manifestations, 188 f.; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 190.

[21] See Emily ALDER, Through Oceans Darkly. Sea Literature and the Nautical Gothic, in: Gothic Studies 19/2 (2017), digitally available under: https://www.napier.ac.uk/~/media/worktribe/output-1000395/through-oceans-darkly-sea-literature-and-the-nautical-gothic.pdf (24.05.2021), 1–15, here 1; RICHTER, Seeseiten, 168.

[22] See ANDEWEG, Manifestations, 188 f.; Lasse HEERTEN, Die Vernetzung der Welt. Maritime Globalisierungen, in: Dorlis Blume et al, ed., Europa und das Meer. Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums 13.06.2018 bis 06.01.2019, Berlin 2018, 89–97, here 89 f., 97; Mix BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 68 f.; Philip de SOUZA, Hart am Wind. Das Zeitalter der Segelschiffe, in: Dorlis Blume et al, ed., Europa und das Meer. Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums 13.06.2018 bis 06.01.2019, Berlin 2018, 62–72, here 62; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 325 f.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who lived from 1772 until 1834, is one of the most famous poets of the English Romantic Period. Together with William Wordsworth (1770–1850) he worked on a poetry collaboration, the *Lyrical Ballads*, that was first published in 1798. There, the ballad *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* can be found. Coleridge revised the poem for later editions of the book and took out many of the original archaisms.[23] In this paper the original version of the poem (1798) will be used.

In the ballad, a mariner narrates his fate to a wedding guest whom he stopped on the way to his sister's wedding. Unwilling, but captivated by the mariner's air and story, the man listens.[24]

3. Dangers on Board

The mariner narrates his travels on a ship going south. Almost every possible calamity befalls him:

Listen, Stranger! Storm and Wind,
A Wind and Tempest strong!
For days and weeks it play'd us freaks—
Like Chaff we drove along.

Listen, Stranger! Mist and Snow,
And it grew wond'rous cauld:
And Ice mast-high came floating by
As green as Emerauld.[25]

After a storm, the ship drifts to the south and is stuck in the icy waters near the south pole. There, it encounters an albatross:

At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the Fog it came;
And an it were a Christian Soul,
We hail'd it in God's name.

The Marineres gave it biscuit-worms,
And round and round it flew:

[23] See Stephen GREENBLATT et al., ed., The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 2, 9th edition, New York / London 2012, 437, 443.
[24] See COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 5 f.; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 328.
[25] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 8

The Ice did split with a Thunder-fit;
The Helmsman steer'd us thro'.

And a good south wind sprung up behind,
The Albatross did follow;
And every day for food or play
Came to the Marinere's hollo![26]

According to seamen´s superstitions, an albatross could be the reincarnation of a sailor who had drowned. This is why the bird is called a "Christian Soul" in the ballad.[27]

The bird brought the sailors luck, as the iceberg split apart and the ship could escape the maze of ice. A southern wind enabled them to sail to warmer seas again. However, the mariner, the narrator who speaks to the wedding guest, shot the albatross with his crossbow. He does not explain in the *Rime*, why he did so.[28]

And I had done an hellish thing
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averr'd, I had kill'd the Bird
That made the Breeze to blow.

Ah wel-a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young;
Instead of the Cross the Albatross
About my neck was hung.[29]

After he had shot the bird and hung it around his neck, the weather became still. No wind, no rain reached the ship for days. The other crewmembers blamed the mariner because they believed the reason for the calm was his killing the bird and they were angry.[30]

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, ne breath ne motion,

[26] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 9.
[27] See ibid, 9; Christina HOLE, Superstitions and Beliefs of the Sea, in: Folklore 78/3 (1967), digitally available under: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1258183 (19.04.2021), 184–189, here 189; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 332.
[28] See COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 9 f.; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 328 f.
[29] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 14.
[30] See ibid, 12–14; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 62 f.; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 327, 330.

As idle as a painted Ship
Upon a painted Ocean[31]

So after storm and ice, the ship finally ends up in a calm. The role of weather as an obstacle is a frequent motive in ghost ship stories, often the defining event that turned a ship into a ghost ship. And for a good reason. The weather, on which every sailing ship depended, posed constant uncertainty for sailors.[32]

4. Living Conditions on Board fostering Disease

Water, water, every where
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Ne any drop to drink.[33]

In the calm, the mariners ship eventually ran out of water. However, even without being stuck in unfavourable weather, the supply of water was always an issue on board ships. It was strictly rationed, as described by Edward Barlow (1639–1719), who was employed by the British East India Company and wrote down a travel journal in 1672:[34]

> "We had several of our men sick with the 'fflukes'[35], and I myself being very bad; the sea being an uncomfortable and bad place for sick men, and many are the miseries that poor seamen endure at sea when they are sick, having small means to comfort themselves with, for there they cannot run and fetch what meat and drink they think will do them good. There they want both fresh meat and drink of all sorts, with both fruits and roots, which the sick on land do not lack to give themselves comfort with, and we having no other thing to eat and drink, to restore health, and comfort ourselves with, unless we can eat a piece of a hard biscuit cake, or a piece of old salt beef or pork, and maybe both stinking and rotten, having lain in pickle one year or two and nothing to drink but a

[31] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 13.
[32] See HEERTEN, Die Vernetzung der Welt, 90; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 60 f.; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 18–20.
[33] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 13.
[34] See Edward BARLOW, Manuscript, in: Basil Lubbock, ed., Barlow's Journal of His Life at Sea in King's Ships. East & West Indiamen & Other Merchantmen from 1659 to 1703, Vol. 1, London 1934, digitally available under: https://books.google.at/books?id=xwMYAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=de&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=213&f=false (29.04.2021); Schmitt, ed., Indienfahrer, 295 f.
[35] A parasitic worm that can infest humans' intestines and also cause fever.

> little fresh water, many times both stinking and dirty, and yet cannot get half enough of it."[36]

This description gives an idea of the supplies on board and their condition. Rotten food and stinking, foul water, that was detrimental for the healthy – and even more dangerous to the sick, who would have needed a different diet to regain their strength.[37]

The condition of provisions on board was often quite bad. When months at sea had passed, not even the highest officials could dine pleasantly anymore: the heat and humidity on board spoilt most foods quickly.[38] Preserving food, especially vegetables, for long journeys was very expensive in Europe. Food stored in glasses, tin canned or air-dried fruits and vegetables were seldom taken aboard.[39] Moreover, cooking was only rarely possible on wooden ships, as fires posed a significant danger. Preparing hot food was only possible when the sea was calm. As a result, sailors shared their provisions with a variety of other species: amongst them rodents and maggots, the so-called biscuit-worms.[40]

The state of provisions was one of the main hazards for diseases on board. Another factor that contributed substantially to the development of diseases was the lack of space and insufficient hygiene on ships.

> "He [the sailor] was always in a crowd by day or night. His work and his leisure, his eating, drinking, washing and sleeping were all in crowded surroundings. He swallowed his bully beef and hard tack, his pea soup, ´copper rattle´, and rum, at a mess table so congested that he had absolutely no elbow room and scarce space to sit. […] He slung his hammock at night among hundreds of others so tightly packed that they had no swinging room however much the ship rolled. Even in the head he had no individual privacy."[41]

As the later Admiral Ballard described in the middle of the 19th century, life on board was far from comfortable. Very little physical space was available to each person on board a ship, so

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[36] BARLOW, Manuscript, 213.
[37] See ibid, 213; GUILLET, The Great Migration, 91 f.; REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord", 193–197; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 253.
[38] See Thomas EISENTRAUT, Schiffe aus Holz, Männer aus Eisen. Alltag der Matrosen, in: Dorlis Blume et al., ed., Europa und das Meer. Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums 13.06.2018 bis 06.01.2019, Berlin 2018, 73–89, here 76; STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 150.
[39] See STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 151.
[40] See EISENTRAUT, Schiffe aus Holz, 76; „… mehr Moder und Rattenkot als Brotkrümel": Jean de Léry über den Proviantmangel auf den Brasilienfahrern *La Grande Roberge* und *Le Jacques* (1557/58), in: Schmitt, ed., Indienfahrer, 200, 254; STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 151.
[41] Admiral BALLARD, in: John Winton, Hurrah for the life of a sailor! Life on the lower-deck of the Victorian Navy, London 1977, digitally available under: https://archive.org/details/hurrahforlifeofs0000wint/page/190/mode/2up (14.05.2021), 192.

sailors were cramped all the time: even when eating or sleeping.[42] English warships, with a length of 70 to 80 meters, had between 100 and 700 men on board during the 19th century.[43] And there are examples of emigrant ships of only 36 meters length housing over 400 passengers.[44] The discomfort of accommodation in such a limited space for such a high amount of people can be imagined.

This extreme overcrowding and lack of personal space was not the only inconvenience on board, however. The sanitary situation and sailors' hygiene left much to be desired as well, a main source for diseases being the bilge; water that gathered constantly in the lowest deck. It consisted of sea water, ship garbage, excrement and was swarming with rodents. The stench on board, emanating from the bilge, permeated everything on board. Contemporaries were aware of the effects those circumstances could have on one's health; they knew such uncleanliness caused and fostered diseases.[45]

The most dangerous diseases for sailors during the Age of Sail were intestinal diseases such as cholera, fevers like typhus, malaria or yellow fever, smallpox and the deficiency disease scurvy. Several aspects made those diseases feared: first of all, many of them were not properly understood. The concept of linking specific pathogens to specific diseases is very recent, it was generally accepted only in the early 20th century.[46] Before that, the belief systems regarding the cause and spread of disease were diverse and diffuse. The Galenic theory still prevailed, claiming that "to cure these illnesses, the body had to be brought back into balance, by purging, bleeding, and clystering"[47]. More "modern" concepts came up during the Enlightenment, seeking causes for diseases in the environment. The most influential of those theories was the miasma theory. Miasmas were believed to be bad fumes, responsible for diseases, that could be warded off by keeping the air clean.[48] Disease was also a social problem: a factor that

[42] See GUILLET, The Great Migration, 89; REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord", 154; STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 136 f.
[43] See REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord", 107.
[44] See STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 135.
[45] See SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 253–255; REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord", 91 f., 147 f.
[46] See WATTS, Epidemics and History, XI–XIII.
[47] See Iris BRUIJN, Ship's Surgeons of the Dutch East India Company. Commerce and the Progress of Medicine in the Eighteenth Century, Leiden 2009, 47.
[48] See Alex CHASE-LEVENSON, The Yellow Flag. Quarantine and the British Mediterranean World. 1780–1860, Cambridge 2020, 106; Jo HAYS, The Burdens of Disease. Epidemics and Human Response in Western History, 2nd edition, New Brunswick / New Jersey / London 2009, digitally available under: https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.36019/9780813548173/html (28.05.2021), 109; REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord", 91–95, 452 f., 479 f.; VÖGELE / KOPPITZ / UMEHARA, Epidemien und Pandemien, 13.

hindered effective health care was prejudice. Certain diseases, such as typhus, were thought to emerge from poverty.[49] Finally, religion and disease were still very closely linked.[50]

For example, scurvy was feared for as long as it was not understood properly. The source of the disease, a deficiency in vitamin C, could only be diagnosed after vitamins had been discovered by Albert Szent-Györgyi (1893–1986) in 1928.[51] Before that, the most common explanation for scurvy was the foul and damp air on board, according to the miasma theory.[52] Scurvy is not an epidemic disease, however, it often resembled one. It occurred after about two months of inadequate diet, befalling many people at about the same time. Therefore, it was often viewed as an infectious disease by contemporary medical personnel.[53]

Contemporaries did not always realize the way infections spread. That was the case with cholera: the bacteria causing it survived in brackish water (therefore, the water storage on a ship provided a perfect environment) and was transmitted by ingesting food or water contaminated by an infected person´s excrements. Thus, the disease was highly infectious, especially in environments with poor hygiene – like ships.[54] In the Age of Sail, there were different approaches trying to explain the disease, for example with the Galenic theory: through melancholy and depression, the disease would emerge, with fear and grief being fatal. The best cure was a "hopeful disposition", according to a sanitary commissioner of the government of India in 1898.[55] All in all, doctors were very often helpless when dealing with disease. "The doctor´s function was to give the impression of *caring*, through placebos, bathings, bleedings, and dietary recommendations. He […] knew full well that he could not actually *cure* the illness."[56]

A second factor that made diseases fearful was the disgusting aspects of them and the scars they left behind on the survivors. Cholera, for example, was described as "one of the most ghastly experiences a disease could inflict on a human being"[57]. People were scared by the rapid progression of the disease. A seemingly healthy person would suddenly be struck

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[49] See John BOOKER, Maritime Quarantine. The British Experience c. 1650–1900, 2nd edition, London / New York 2016; 257; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 256; STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 131 f.; WATTS, Epidemics and History, XII, XV, 172.
[50] See HAYS, The Burdens of Disease, 109, 111; WATTS, Epidemics and History, XI.
[51] See HAYS, The Burdens of Disease, 127; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 251; Mathieu TORCK, Maritime Travel and the Question of Provisions and Scurvy in a Chinese Context in: East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine 23 (2005), digitally available under: https://brill.com/view/journals/east/23/1/east.23.issue-1.xml?language=en (28.05.2021), 54–78, here 54 f.
[52] See HAYS, The Burdens of Disease, 128; TORCK, Maritime Travel, 56.
[53] See EISENTRAUT, Schiffe aus Holz, 77; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 251.
[54] See DIAMOND / PANOSIAN, Continental Asymmetry, 30; EISENTRAUT, Schiffe aus Holz, 76; STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 130; WATTS, Epidemics and History, 167–170.
[55] See WATTS, Epidemics and History, 171.
[56] Ibid, XI-XII.
[57] WATTS, Epidemics and History, 173.

by it, start vomiting and suffer from diarrhoea, losing all bodily fluids. This dehydration led to painful cramps, affecting the entire body. "Perhaps young and attractive in the morning, by nightfall they had become shrivelled wrecks with darkened bluish skin, sunken eyes and protruding teeth."[58] Within hours, a cholera victim might be dead. The survivors, only about 50 per cent of the people struck with the disease, could retain permanent disabilities.[59] Yet another disease that left awful marks on its survivors was smallpox: survivors could retain visible physical damage on their bodies, scarring them for life.[60]

Finally, diseases were feared because of the high mortality they were responsible for. Diseases were more dangerous than anything else on board ships, such as naval fights or accidents. In the Age of Sail, it was much more common to die of a disease than of any other cause while on board a ship.[61] This could be as extreme as on George Ansons´ (1697–1762) naval expedition in 1740, where a thousand sailors died of scurvy while only four died in consequence of battles.[62] Similarly, of 167 deaths at the British East India station fleet in the year of 1863, 116 were caused by diseases.[63]

It is interesting that, of all the dangers that are mentioned in the *Rime*, disease is not explicitly included. Still, there are references that remind us of epidemics on ships or how they were dealt with – references especially to the most frightening aspects of diseases.

5. Beholding a Plague Ship

One such frightening aspect was beholding another ship that was struck by a disease. "The regular appearance of ships actually carrying the plague (in the form of stricken sailors) in European ports could create local panic."[64] Ships struck by a disease posed a serious threat: every person getting in contact with such ships could potentially become infected themselves.[65] Quarantines imposed on ships demonstrate vividly the fear epidemics posed on harbour towns and even whole countries. The most feared diseases were, for example, yellow

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[58] Ibid, 173.
[59] See STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 130; WATTS, Epidemics and History, 173, 178.
[60] See HAYS, The Burdens of Disease, 120 f.; STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 128; VÖGELE / KOPPITZ / UMEHARA, Epidemien und Pandemien, 9 f.
[61] See HAYS, The Burdens of Disease, 128; REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord", 118 f.
[62] See HAYS, The Burdens of Disease, 128.
[63] See REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord", 118.
[64] CHASE-LEVENSON, The Yellow Flag, 91.
[65] See ibid., 15.

fever and cholera.[66] Typhus was yet another disease that often prompted a quarantine. In general, it was those diseases that were highly dangerous and could quickly develop into an epidemic.[67]

"The yellow flag[68], the abominable yellow flag, still marks our ship as 'plague smitten'. Every boat steers off from us, afraid of contamination."[69] This statement by Edward P. Montague, who experienced quarantine in a Spanish port in 1848, gives an impression of yet another fear resulting from quarantine: the fear of being separated completely from all other ships, the fear of isolation.[70] That way, not only the diseases themselves, but even the tactics and methods used to cope with diseases and keep them at bay – the reactions to a ship struck with an epidemic – could terrify the sailors.

In the *Rime*, beholding the spectre ship resembles how sailors must have felt when they came in contact with plaque ships: the first joy of meeting another ship would quickly turn into horror, when it was discovered that a dangerous disease was on board there.

With throat unslack'd, with black lips bak'd
Ne could we laugh, ne wail:
Then while thro' drouth all dumb they stood
I bit my arm and suck'd the blood
And cry'd, A sail! a sail!

With throat unslack'd, with black lips bak'd
Agape they hear'd me call:
Gramercy! they for joy did grin
And all at once their breath drew in
As they were drinking all.

She doth not tack. from side to side—
Hither to work us weal
Withouten wind, withouten tide
She steddies with upright keel.

The western wave was all a flame,
The day was well nigh done!
Almost upon the western wave

[66] See BOOKER, Maritime Quarantine, XIII, 256–263.
[67] See STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 138.
[68] The yellow flag was the official signal for quarantine on a ship.
[69] Edward MONTAGUE, Narrative of the Late Expedition to the Dead Sea. From a Diary by One of the Party, Philadelphia 1849, 79.
[70] See CHASE-LEVENSON, The Yellow Flag, 15; RIEMANN, Grundformen der Angst, 13.

Rested the broad bright Sun;
When that strange shape drove suddenly
Betwixt us and the Sun.

And strait the Sun was fleck'd with bars
(Heaven's mother send us grace)
As if thro' a dungeon grate he peer'd
With broad and burning face.

Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
How fast she neres and neres!
Are those her Sails that glance in the Sun
Like restless gossameres?

Are these her naked ribs, which fleck'd
The sun that did behind them peer?
And are those two all, all the crew,
That woman and her fleshless Pheere?[71]

While at first joyful to view another ship, the mariner and his comrades soon grow horrified by the sight of the ghost ship.

When ships met during their journeys on the high sea, the fear of catching a disease led crews to be very cautious and guarded.[72] In the following case, a French vessel encountered the ship of Theophilus Conneau (1804–1860), a slave trader who wrote an account of his travels. After the usual salutes, this is what happened:[73]

> "The Frenchman begged permission to send his boat on board with letters to be forwarded to the Isle of France. The request was granted, but the French Commander was informed that we had several cases of smallpox which we had probably got at Angola, and could not invite his officer on board.
>
> The words were hardly spoken when the Frenchman squared away, braced sharp up, and made off with all haste, not even giving the customary salute."[74]

[71] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 16–18.
[72] See BRUIJN, Ship's Surgeons, 50; BOOKER, Maritime Quarantine, XIII, 5; CHASE-LEVENSON, The Yellow Flag, 1–3, 15, 33.
[73] See Theophilus CONNEAU, A Slaver's Logbook or 20 Years' Residence in Africa. The Original 1853 Manuscript, 2nd edition, Englewood Cliffs 1976, digitally available under: https://archive.org/details/slaverslogbookor0000cano/page/194/mode/2up (14.05.2021); SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 230 f.
[74] CONNEAU, A Slaver's Logbook, 191 f.

After hearing of ill people on board the ship, sick with a dangerous and contagious disease, the French turned their ship around immediately and sailed off, without a final word of good-bye. In this case, the warning was a bluff, there were not even sick people on board. It was employed by the crew to keep the French off their ship and keep them from discovering their illegal slave shipping operation. They had deliberately used the general fear of diseases to their advantage.[75]

Another reference to disease in the ballad is the description of the two figures on the spectre ship, especially of the woman:

Her lips are red, her looks are free,
Her locks are yellow as gold:
Her skin is as white as leprosy,
And she is far liker Death than he;
Her flesh makes the still air cold.[76]

The woman is described first as very beautiful, but then shows aspects of sickness and disease that seemed revolting: with a skin like a leper´s, she resembled death more than the skeleton next to her.[77]

The naked Hulk alongside came
And the Twain were playing dice;
"The Game is done! I've won, I've won!"
Quoth she, and whistled thrice.[78]

This part was interpreted as a game of dice where the woman and the skeleton on board of the spectre ship played with the lives of the men on the mariner's ship. The woman won – and the mariners comrades fell dead. However, their bodies did not decompose, but stayed the way they were when they had died (even the curse in their eyes stayed the same), until they were reanimated.[79]

[75] See CONNEAU, A Slaver's Logbook, 191 f.; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 281–288.
[76] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 18.
[77] See ibid.; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 330.
[78] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 19.
[79] See COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 20–23, 28 f.; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 330.

6. Dealing with Death

Four times fifty living men,
With never a sigh or groan.
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump
They dropp'd down one by one. […]

I look'd upon the rotting Sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I look'd upon the eldritch deck,
And there the dead men lay.[80]

The mariner stayed alive for a whole week further, with only the bodies of his dead comrades and the sea creatures around him. Everyone except him had dropped down dead after the encounter with the spectre ship.[81]

The possibility of death was one of the main reasons to fear a disease. And dying on sea was a likely scenario – in the Age of Sail, it was more common to die of a disease than of any other cause while on board a ship.[82] And that had its own frightening implications:

> "And when he is dead, he is quickly buried, saving his friends and acquaintance that trouble to go to the church and have his passing bell rung, nor to be at the charges of making his grave and his coffin, or to bid his friends and acquaintance to his burial, or to buy wine or bread for them to drink or eat before they go to church, and none of all this trouble, but when he is dead to sew him up in an old blanket or piece of old canvas, and tie to his feet two or three cannon bullets, and so to heave him overboard, wishing his poor soul at rest, not having a minister to read over his grave, nor any other ceremonies, but praying to God for the forgiveness of his sins, and there he hath a grave may times wide and big enough, being made meat for the fishes of the sea as well as for the worms on land."[83]

If one died at sea, without ceremony, without a priest, one was thrown overboard. The way in which this was done is described by Edward Barlow (1639–1719). Wrapped up and sewn into a blanked, with cannon balls tied to their feet, the dead were dropped into the ocean. Two things are described to be particularly pitiable about such a burial. First, Barlow ironically

[80] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 20, 22.
[81] See ibid, 23.
[82] See HAYS, The Burdens of Disease, 128; REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord", 118 f.
[83] BARLOW, Manuscript, 214.

states how no family and friends could be present to say their farewells. Moreover, there was no priest at hand to hold an official funeral ceremony, only the comrades´ prayers.[84]

> "One got used to it—it was nothing but splash, splash, all day long—first one, then another. There was one Martin on board, I remember, with a wife and nine children—one of those as sold his pension: he had fought in Spain with the Duke of Wellington. Well, first his wife died, and they threw her into the sea and then he died, and they threw him into the sea, and then the children, one after t'other, till only two were left alive; the eldest, a girl about thirteen who had nursed them all, one after another, and seen them die—well, she died, and then there was only the little fellow left… He went back, as I heard, in the same ship with the captain."[85]

This section was written by a Scottish passenger with the name Sholto, who travelled on an emigration ship from the British Isles towards Canada in the 1830s. He described how the outbreak of a cholera on a ship could wipe out whole families in a matter of days. He also stressed how a bystander had no chance to help, could do nothing but get "used to it"[86].

In the *Rime*, after the sighting of the spectre ship two hundred men fell dead at once. Although it is described as more instantly than it would have happened during an epidemic on board, the rapid development and spread of diseases and their sudden, violent end are reflected in this description. On ships, it was possible that many people lost their life in a matter of days.[87]

Another aspect in the ballad reminds us of disease as well; the spectre ship seems to spread it´s horror to the mariner´s ship, which then becomes a ghost ship itself. It seems that being a ghost ship spreads like a disease. "Though the specter does not attempt to communicate directly with the Mariner's ship, the encounter is infectious. After contact with this Gothic vessel, the Mariner's ship contracts a similar ghastly condition."[88] It is as if the spectre ship itself was contagious.[89] A similar idea was evoked in another ghost ship story, *The Flying Dutchman* (I use the standard version of the tale that was published in Blackwood´s Edinburgh Magazine in 1821). There, amidst a storm, an English ship views the Flying Dutchman – the

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[84] See BARLOW, Manuscript, 214; GUILLET, The Great Migration, 92; Edward Barlo über den einsamen Tod des Seemans, in: SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 296 f.
[85] SHOLTO, Reaction of the Passengers, quoted in: Edwin Guillet, The Great Migration. The Atlantic Crossing by Sailing-Ship 1770–1860, 2nd edition, Toronto 1963, digitally available under: https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.3138/9781487596262/html (28.05.2021), 90.
[86] See ibid, 90; GUILLET, The Great Migration, VII, 90.
[87] See MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 63; COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 20; CONNEAU, A Slaver's Logbook, 193 f.; SHOLTO, Reaction of the Passengers, 90; WATTS, Epidemics and History, 173, 178.
[88] MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 63.
[89] See COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 15–31; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 63.

legendary cursed ship that keeps sailing the storms at the Cape of Good Hope forever.[90] "We must keep clear of her. […] No good comes to them who have communication with him."[91] They feared the ghost ship would curse them, too, they feared to share the Flying Dutchman´s fate.[92] Not because of their contagious disease, but because of their curse the ship was avoided and feared, a curse that was seen as something that could transfer to ships that had come into contact with the Flying Dutchman, transmitted almost as if the curse was a dangerous disease.[93]

7. Forms of Anxiety

With the curse in the eyes of his dead comrades, the mariner stayed alive:

Alone, alone, all all alone
Alone on the wide wide Sea;
And Christ would take no pity on
My soul in agony.[94]

After seven days of this misery, finally, the mariner found a way to lift his curse. He, who before had shot the albatross for no apparent reason, now saw the beauty in all living things of the sea and blessed them. He started to pray and was relieved from the curse. Thereafter, rain was setting in. All dead men rose again, not alive, but animated – the ship itself became a ghost ship. The dead started to work and interact with each other, but only among themselves, they ignored the living mariner. They set a course and sailed on, without a breeze, without wind. It was now the mariner's turn to become frightened. He sought comfort in prayer, a recurring theme in the ballad now. Finally, this ghost ship reached the mariner's homeland again. The ship and its deadly crew sank, while the mariner as the only survivor was rescued and now roamed the land, telling his story again and again.[95]

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[90] See ANDEWEG, Manifestations, 191; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 61; N. N., Vanderdecken's Message Home. Or, The Tenacity of Natural Affection, in: Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 9/50 (1821), digitally available under: https://books.google.at/books?id=tmU6AQAAMAAJ&pg=PA127&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false (12.04.2021), 127–131.
[91] N. N., Vanderdecken's Message Home, 128.
[92] See ANDEWEG, Manifestations, 193; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 62; N. N., Vanderdecken's Message Home, 127 f.
[93] See BOOKER, Maritime Quarantine, XIII, 5; CHASE-LEVENSON, The Yellow Flag, 1–3, 15, 33; N. N., Vanderdecken's Message Home, 128–130.
[94] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 21.
[95] See ibid., 25–48; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 63; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 330 f.

Fear is both mentioned in the ballad explicitly as well as alluded to indirectly. The sections that address fear directly within the poem are those relating to supernatural occurrences. This is the case, for example, when the reanimated bodies looked at the mariner, with the curse in their eyes.[96] Towards the end of the mariner's tale, as the ghost ship with his reanimated comrades sank before the English coast, fear is directly mentioned again, by the people who rescued the mariner. They, a hermit, and a ship navigator, had caught sight of the ghost ship and were rowing towards it on a little boat:[97]

"Dear Lord! it has a fiendish look—"
(The Pilot made reply)
"I am a-fear'd." – "Push on, push on!"
Said the Hermit cheerily.[98]

As the bodies evoked fear on the mariner on board the ghost ship, so did the ghost ship inspire fear amongst those who beheld it. However, the chain of fear did not end there: the tale itself, when told by the mariner to the wedding guest, imposed fear.[99] When the part of the tale in which the mariner´s comrades all dropped dead was related to the listening wedding guest, he exclaimed:

"I fear thee, ancyent Marinere!
I fear thy skinny hand;
And thou art long and lank and brown
As is the ribb'd Sea-sand.

I fear thee and thy glittering eye
And thy skinny hand so brown –"
"Fear not, fear not, thou wedding guest!
This body dropt not down."[100]

These supernatural occurrences, the spectre ship, the death and reanimation of the crew and the ghost ship navigated by the dead evoked fear in all those who encountered them – by sight or by word.[101]

[96] See BOURKE, Fear and Anxiety, 126; COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 37.
[97] See ibid., 42–48.
[98] Ibid., 46.
[99] See ibid., 20; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 64.
[100] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 21.
[101] See ibid.; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 331.

Fritz Riemann, a psychoanalyst in the early 20th century, understood fear as an emotion appearing in every new and unfamiliar situation as well as in every situation one feels one cannot handle (yet).[102] Epidemics were situations that no ship, crew, captain or even ship´s surgeon could handle. Therefore, when a disease broke out on board a ship, fear was a very reasonable reaction.[103]

Riemann developed a theory on four forms of anxieties: first, a fear of dependence and loss of self or personality. This fear is understandable, if we consider a sailor's situation. More than anything, sailors were dependent upon their vessel, that in turn depended on external factors such as weather and wind.[104] This is described in the *Rime*: first the violent storm, then the frozen sea, finally the calm – the ship depended entirely on the weather and was at its mercy. Dependence was also experienced on another level: the mariner could almost never make his own decisions or hold fate in his own hands. When his ship was trapped in the frozen sea, it was dependent on the albatross for rescue. When it was stuck in the calm, the only chance for change was the spectre ship, they depended on it. And after his ship turned into a ghost ship, the mariner depended on the reanimated bodies of his comrades, who set the course.[105]

The second form of anxiety Riemann proposed is the fear of a lack security and of being isolated. Isolation is a major theme in the *Rime* – in addition to the general loneliness of a ship at sea during the Age of Sail, this ship encountered several situations in which it was caught with no opportunity to reach out for help; as in the frozen sea and during the calm. Furthermore, the mariner was isolated within the community on board the ship when his comrades blamed him for the calm (because he had shot the albatross) as well as when they ignored him when they were reanimated bodies. He was isolated even within the social group of his own ship. Finally, he was also isolated and utterly alone in the seven days before his dead comrades were reanimated.[106] In respect to diseases, isolation was felt when a ship´s crew had caught a disease: quarantined and shunned by all other ships, they were completely cut off from contact with others.[107]

[102] See RIEMANN, Grundformen der Angst, 9.
[103] See SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 259; WATTS, Epidemics and History, XII, 167.
[104] See HEERTEN, Die Vernetzung der Welt, 90; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 60.
[105] See COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 9 f., 12–20; RIEMANN, Grundformen der Angst, 13 f.
[106] See COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 8–13, 21, 29–31; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 62 f.; RIEMANN, Grundformen der Angst, 13.
[107] See CHASE-LEVENSON, The Yellow Flag, 15; RIEMANN, Grundformen der Angst, 13.

Third is a fear of uncertainty, risk and unpredictability. This can be traced in the description of the calm in the *Rime* – as the crewmembers waited for days for the wind to reappear, for the rain to fall – uncertain if the change would arrive in time, or if they would run out of water before that.[108] Another example for fear of uncertainty in the *Rime* is visible when the reanimated bodies controlled the mariner's ship, transforming it into a ghost ship. Uncertain if the dead meant him good or harm, the mariner dreaded them and could only turn to prayer for hope.[109]

The final fear proposed by Riemann is the fear to lose one´s freedom and chance of self-development.[110] On the one hand, loss of freedom can be traced to when the ship was unable to move on, when it was stuck in a situation it could not escape: like a storm or a calm.[111] In addition, the mariner lost his freedom after his ship had turned into a ghost ship, when the reanimated bodies set a course and sailed on – the mariner had no chance to participate in the decision of their destination. He was controlled externally. He was utterly controlled by the bodies he dreaded and feared, dependent on a ghost ship he somehow was still part of.[112]

8. Superstition, Religion and Salvation

Superstition and Religion are key elements in Coleridge's ballad. One focus of sailors' superstitions were birds, as they played a huge role in maritime life: they were beheld by sailors as heralds of nearby land, seen before the island or continent was itself. Some birds were seen to be omens of good or bad weather, or their cries a warning of storms.[113] In that role, birds frequently found their way into ghost ship stories. In the *Flying Dutchman*, the cursed parcel of letters is blown away "like birds of ill omen"[114] and the weather changes from storm to a milder wind. As the ill omen is gone, the English ship can continue its journey with renewed hope.[115]

In the *Rime*, birds play a central role in the figure of the albatross. Killing this bird was a crime and for that crime the ship's crew was punished harshly.[116] After the curse was lifted,

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108 See COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 12–14; RIEMANN, Grundformen der Angst, 14 f.
109 See COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 28–39; RIEMANN, Grundformen der Angst, 14 f.; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 331.
110 See RIEMANN, Grundformen, 10–15.
111 See ANDEWEG, Manifestations, 194; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 60; REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord", 485; RIEMANN, Grundformen der Angst, 15, SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 18–20.
112 See COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 28–39; RIEMANN, Grundformen der Angst, 13 f.; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 331.
113 See HOLE, Superstitions and Beliefs of the Sea, 187, 189; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 332.
114 N. N., Vanderdecken's Message Home, 131.
115 See HOLE, Superstitions and Beliefs of the Sea, 187, 189; N. N., Vanderdecken's Message Home, 131; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 332.
116 See HOLE, Superstitions and Beliefs of the Sea, 187, 189; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 332.

the return of the birds is described as a hopeful and merry event. It brought life and sound back to the ship:

Sometimes a dropping from the sky
I heard the Lavrock sing;
Sometimes all little birds that are
How they seem'd to fill the sea and air
With their sweet jargoning.[117]

Religion plays an even more central role in the *Rime*, as the mariner is only able to lift his curse when he was able to find beauty in all beings and bless all living things:

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gusht from my heart,
And I bless'd them unaware!
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I bless'd them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.[118]

As soon as he lifted his curse through his prayers, he prayed again and again, especially during times of great fear. Finally, he advised the listener to be faithfully and earnestly religious.[119]

One could argue that the curses inflicted on ghost ships were caused by impious behaviour, in the *Rime*, by killing an innocent animal (or even a human in the body of the albatross, as sailor's superstition viewed it, the albatross being "a Christian soul").[120] The punishment was the ship's ruin, it was transformed into a ghost ship. One could identify this as a central aspect of the stories, stressing how sailors had to be, above all else, good Christians, if they wanted to be successful in reaching their destination.[121]

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[117] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 29 f.
[118] Ibid., 25.
[119] Ibid., 25–50.
[120] See ibid., 9; HOLE, Superstitions and Beliefs of the Sea, 189; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 332.
[121] See ANDEWEG, Manifestations, 196; LYDON, Visions of Disaster, 351, 353, 357, 368; ZAPF, „We were a ghastly crew", 332.

This very narrative can also be detected in earlier publications of travel journals – for example, in Bontekoe's travel journal *Memorable Description of the East Indian Voyage*.[122] Jane Lydon emphasises that the principles upon which stories, even travel journals, were told were moral, order and religion.[123] To some extent, ghost ship stories follow these principles as well.

Six verses at the very end of the *Rime* are an appeal to the conscience of listeners and readers, to pray and to love all beings:

He prayeth well who loveth well,
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.[124]

This demonstrates that ghost ship stories could have within them not only horror, but also religious meaning and moral.[125]

9. Concluding remarks

In the Age of Sail, continents, countries and communities around the globe became interconnected. Voyages around the globe were frequent, increasingly long shipping routes were established and goods from East Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas were exchanged. People travelled the world and inhabited locations on the other side of the globe. A complex network of goods, people and news was developed that exists to this day – Globalisation had begun.[126]

However, this maritime expansion brought not only possibilities, it had its downside as well: just as the potential profit of an ocean voyage was high, so were its risks. Although the globe might seem connected, and exchange between continents happened more frequently than ever before, the connection was loose: it still took an immensely long time for people,

[122] See Willem Ysbrantsz. BONTEKOE VAN HOORN, Memorable Description of the East Indian Voyage. 1618–25, London 1929, digitally available under: https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.284003/page/n65/mode/2up (14.05.2021).
[123] See LYDON, Visions of Disaster, 351, 353, 357, 368.
[124] COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, 50.
[125] See ANDEWEG, Manifestations, 196; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 185.
[126] See ALDER, Through Oceans Darkly, 8; ANDEWEG, Mainfestations, 192 f.; Roger CROWLEY, Das Meer besitzen. Der Aufstieg der Seemächte, in: Dorlis Blume et al., ed., Europa und das Meer. Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Historischen Museums 13.06.2018 bis 06.01.2019, Berlin 2018, 23–33, hier: 27–29; HEERTEN, Die Vernetzung der Welt, 89, 92; De SOUZA, Hart am Wind, 62.

goods and news to travel across the globe. Travelling from the Netherlands to India would take a whole year in the early 17th century[127] and even in the early 19th century, a voyage from England to Australia still took four months.[128] During such a long time span, much could happen. And the journeys were a dangerous endeavour.

Ghost ship stories reflect many such frightening facets of early Globalisation. It was the aim of this article to shed light on one such facet in particular: on the anxieties caused by diseases and epidemics and how they are reflected in Coleridges´ *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*.

Upon embarkation on a ship, one could not count on setting foot on land ever again. On board a ship, life was constantly threatened – and among the greatest dangers were diseases. The living conditions on board of ships provided a perfect environment for their spread.[129]

One factor those diseases all had in common made them particularly frightening: they were fatal for a high percentage of the people who got infected and they led to many deaths on ships. In addition, many survivors of smallpox or cholera were left with lifelong scars, even if they survived.[130] What made the experience even more terrifying was that many of the diseases could simply not be explained by contemporaries in the Age of Sail. The prevalent theories were insufficient in providing a full understanding. The Galenic theory, the environmental approach (including the miasma theory), the blaming of social classes, ascribing some diseases to certain circles within society, or the declaration of religious causes were not sufficient explanations.[131]

As a result, dealing with diseases in an efficient way was not possible during the Age of Sail. Ship's surgeons were helpless if an epidemic disease took hold of their crew and passengers. People were left with anxieties, fearing contagion from ships struck by disease. Therefore, such ships were shunned: quarantined outside of harbours and towns and avoided by other ships on the high seas. Furthermore, the prospect of death and burial at sea was a frightening one, far from relatives and friends, with no proper funeral or ceremony, one's body was tossed into the ocean.[132]

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[127] See BONTEKOE VAN HOORN, Memorable Description.
[128] See STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 140 f.
[129] See GUILLET, The Great Migration, 89; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 253.
[130] See HAYS, The Burdens of Disease, 120 f., 128; REGER, „Dann sprang er über Bord", 118 f.; STANIFORTH, Diet, Disease and Death, 128, 130; VÖGELE / KOPPITZ / UMEHARA, Epidemien und Pandemien, 9 f.; WATTS, Epidemics and History, 173, 178.
[131] See HAYS, The Burdens of Disease, 109, 111; VÖGELE / KOPPITZ / UMEHARA, Epidemien und Pandemien, 12; WATTS, Epidemics and History, XI, 172.
[132] See BARLOW, Manuscript, 214; BRUIJN, Ship's Surgeons, 50; BOOKER, Maritime Quarantine, XIII, 5; CHASE-LEVENSON, The Yellow Flag, 1–3, 15, 33; GUILLET, The Great Migration, 92; SCHMITT, ed., Indienfahrer, 259, 296 f.; WATTS, Epidemics and History, XII, 167.

Many of these concerns and anxieties are mirrored in ghost ship stories. In the *Rime* associations with disease are evoked in the description of the spectre ship and its occupants, although no sickness is displayed directly within the narrative.[133]

Ghost ship stories vividly demonstrate and mirror the material dangers of seafaring, like storms and calms. Furthermore, the tales invoke irrational fears of supernatural occurrences, like curses – that were often used as explanations for when disasters struck at sea. Many of the frightening aspects described in ghost ship stories are comparable to the frightening aspects of disease outbreaks on ships, like being isolated and denied all help, or being left alone to face the uncertainty of what may come.

Religion and superstition played a huge role in ghost ship stories as well as in explaining calamities and diseases. In the *Rime*, religion is the one solution offered to lift the curse and prayer offers respite for the frightened mariner.[134]

A project that might stimulate further research would be a comprehensive compilation of sources in the context of ghost ships (not only the literary sources, but, more importantly, the actual occurrences of ships empty of all living crew). So far, historians have not shown sufficient interest in this issue, but such a focus could highlight many new aspects to the topic of life and death in the Age of Sail. One could make an attempt at estimating the impact such incidents had on trade, the navy or the daily life of a sailor. Sparking interest in this field of research could extend the historical basis for the mythical phenomenon of ghost ships that produced such horror and fear.

[133] See COLERIDGE, The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere; MIX BARRINGTON, Phantom Bark, 63.
[134] See LYDON, Visions of Disaster, 353.

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