

SIMEON SOLOMON AND THE ROMANTIC POETS

The Jewish painter Simeon Solomon (1840-1905) was heavily influenced by the writings of the English Romantic poets. In fact, most of his themes are based on literature, from his early sketchbook to his own literary experiment, the prose poem A Vision Of Love Revealed In Sleep, privately published in 1871.

In his art works, Solomon fits topoi of the Romantic poets into his private mythology (which is clearly shown in his book). After 1871, many of his pictures and drawings are either directly based on Romantic poetry or illustrate themes from his own tale.

In this article, I shall show how Solomon treats the themes of the Romantic poets and adjusts them to his own world of ideas. I shall restrict myself to those poets whose influence is obvious, because the artist chose subjects from their poetry.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

In the sketchbook dating from ca. 1857-1860, which was admired by the Pre-Raphaelites surrounding Dante Gabriel Rossetti,¹ there is a drawing (page 63) based on The Ancient Mariner (Fig. 1). It shows the narrator of the poem, who was punished for shooting an albatross; the punishment consisted of a terrifying sea-journey to unknown, unearthly regions. In Solomon's drawing, the mariner wears a sign around his neck with the words: "I shot that albatross" written on it. The dead bird itself also hangs around his neck.

This is a characteristic example of Solomon's humour; the incident does not occur in the poem itself and it seems as if the artist had not taken the poet quite seriously.

Under the drawing the following lines of the ballad are written:

"Ah! wretch, said they, the bird to slay
That made the breeze to blow"

To the left and right, two of the mariner's companions are represented. Although the drawing is somewhat satirical, The Ancient Mariner with its visionary journey may have influenced Solomon's own dream-journey, which is described in A Vision Of Love Revealed In Sleep. In this story, the quester is also punished and has to be purified before he reaches his goal and is able to return to